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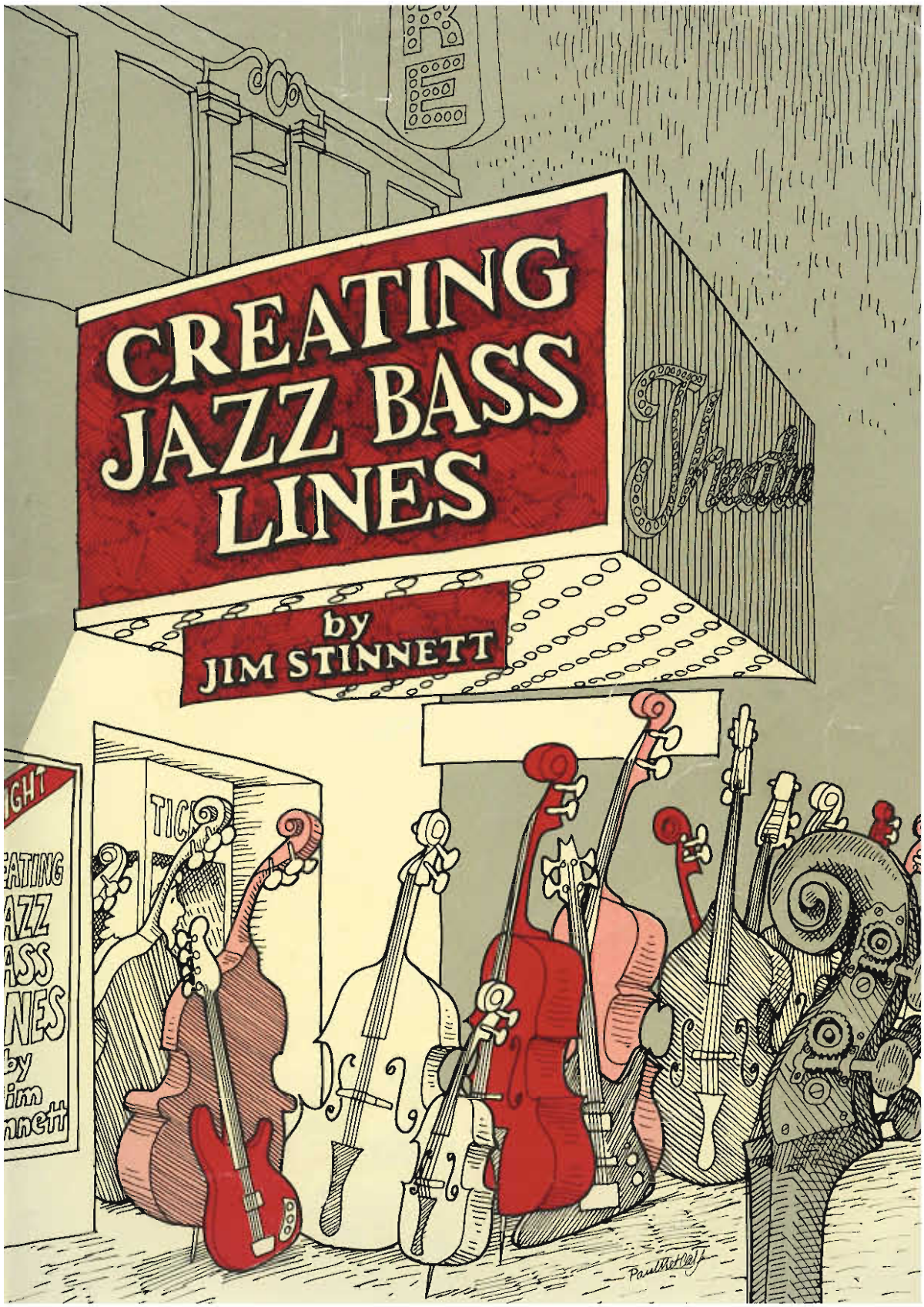
CREATING
JAZZ BASS
LINES
by
JIM STINNETT

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Cover Illustration by Paul Metcalf
Music Notation by John Metcalf

Time

Most of the music in our world moves in time. With some music this movement is quite subtle. While with other styles the beat may be heard with varying degrees of emphasis. When listening to music with a continuous pulse the "time" is a very important factor. In jazz the "time" is the thing. By using the word "time" to define a feeling instead of a measurable amount of duration, this concept of time in music can become confusing.

When a jazz musician talks about ***time*** he is not speaking of tempo or velocity. Rather he is speaking of intensity and consistency. When a musician is playing good time he is "grooving". The word *groove* itself implies an even steadiness. "He's in the groove" is a common phrase used to describe someone whose playing is smooth and steady. When a jazz group is playing good time it is common to say that they are "cooking". This implies an energy or intensity like heat boiling water. Playing good time is a controlled intensity. The really good musicians can create this time feeling regardless of the style or tempo of the music. All of the great musicians have a strong sense of time.

To play good time is more natural for some than for others. To develop good time takes a strong commitment to using your ears and feelings and concentration when playing. As a bassist, to be able to groove is a must.

As a teacher I have found that if a person is having problems with time it is usually not because of inability but rather due to distractions. Often there is a physical

hindrance like not being able to execute the things one is trying to play. Most common is a lack of priorities concerning the different aspects of music making. Simply the ***time*** needs to be more important than the notes. I once had a pianist say to me, "No matter how many hot licks you play, if they're not in time they just don't make it." When you are playing, try to emulate that feeling which you experience while listening to the great players. Remember that the groove comes from a repetition of pulse, not speed or aggression. Playing good time gives you the same feeling as when you are walking and not conscious of your step. If your mind is preoccupied and your pace is not interrupted your steps will naturally fall into a rhythm, and when you become aware of this rhythm it feels as though you can't stop walking. This feeling is a "groove". When you are playing good time everything you play will just seem to flow. For me it is as though time is always going. I just have to pick the tempo and jump aboard. The trick is not to upset the train.

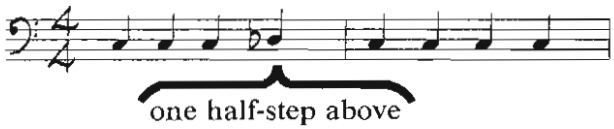
It is important to practice ***in time*** as your practice habits will strongly affect your performance. In this book some exercises will fall in time better than others. This is because each exercise was written with the emphasis on what to play rather than the ease of execution. The tempo should be slow enough to allow you to play each exercise non-stop with no mistakes. Remember, we are building a set of habits.

Blues Lines

Half-Step

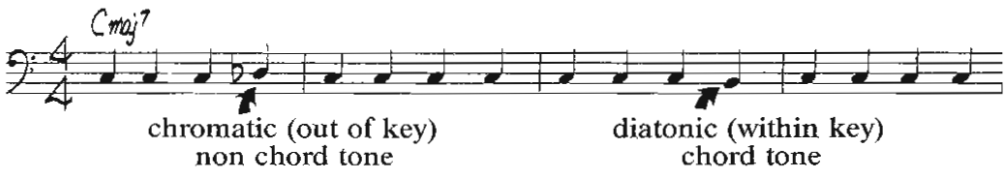
As music moves there is a building of tension and then a release. This kind of movement is common to most music and can happen many times, and on many different levels, in a single piece. In jazz, a good walking bass line is constantly ***building*** and ***releasing*** tension. There are many ways to create tension while playing a bass line. The simplest and probably most common way of doing this is to use the "half-step approach". The half-step approach precedes a stable tone, such as the root of a chord, by a pitch one half-step above or below.

Example #1

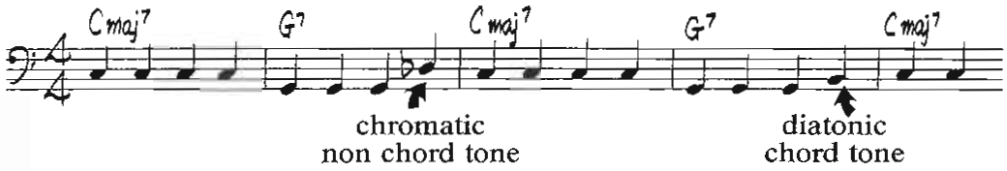


Certain half-step notes will sound more dissonant than others, depending on the qual the chords and the chordal movement.

Example #2



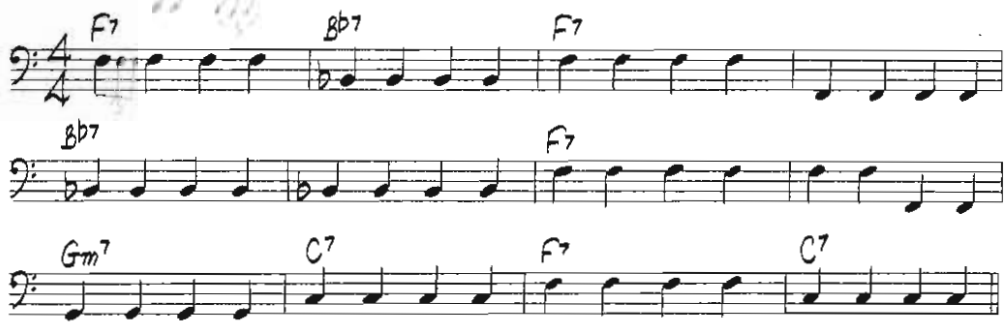
Example #3



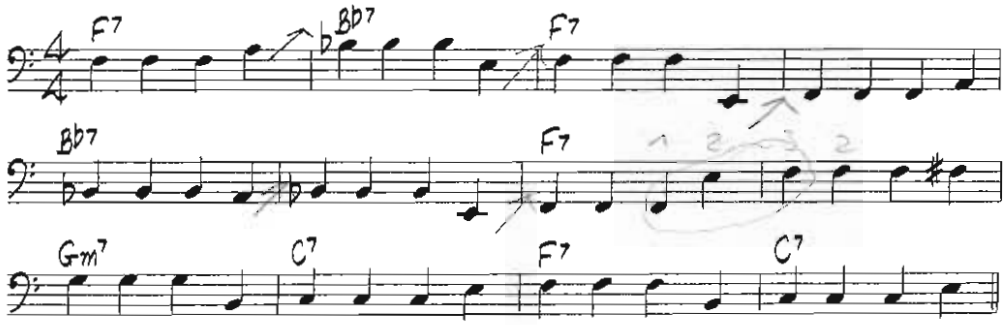
Which half-step, and how frequently it is used, will determine the amount of harmonic tension produced. Listen to any of the great bassists and you will hear these half-step approaches.

In creating a walking bass line, let us start with a basic jazz blues.

Example #4 Blues form and chord changes (roots only)

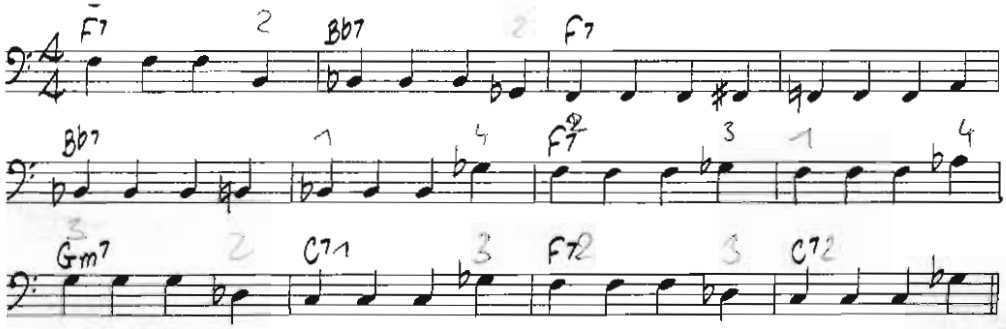


Example #5 Roots and half-step below



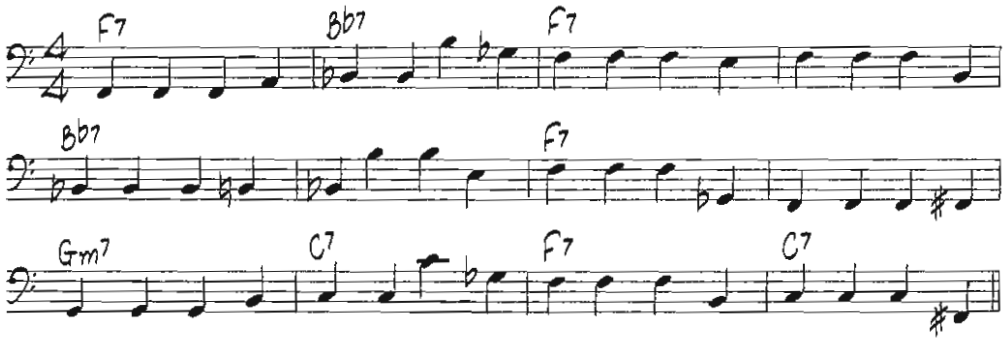
Notice how the half-step on beat 4 leads to the downbeat of the next chord.

Example #6 Roots and half-step above



It is important to practice these exercises using both *above* and ***below*** half-step approaches. I suggest learning the blues in three keys, playing only the roots and half-steps above until your ear is thoroughly familiar with this sound. Then play the same blues — but now with the roots and half-steps below. Practice until this sound is in your ears and fingers. The next step is a combination of both half-step approaches.

Example #7 Roots and half-step above and below



The pitfall to avoid here is that of only playing those half-steps which fall easily under your fingers. Make yourself use both *above* and ***below*** half-steps until you can easily switch between the two. Ultimately you want your *ear* to decide which notes to play, not your hands.

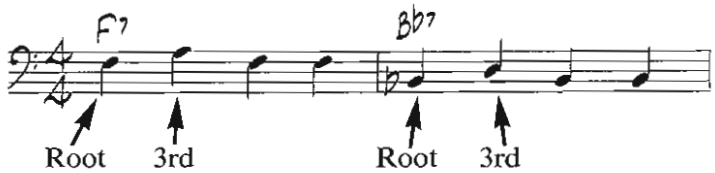
Chord-Tones

The next step in developing our walking bass line is to do something with ***repeated root tones.*** The options can be grouped into three categories:

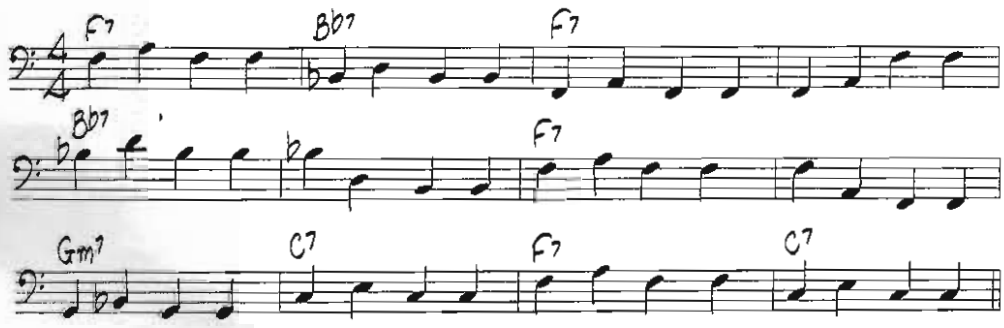
- **Chord Tones**
- **Scales**
- **Chromatics**

Let us start with roots and one other designated chord tone. Where to play this new pitch within the measure is a matter of choice, but for now let's keep the root on the strong beats (1 and 3) and let us assume there will be a half-step approach note on beat 4 leading to the next chord. That leaves beat 2 for our new chord tone. The first chord tone above the root we will use is the 3rd:

Example #8 Root, 3rd, root

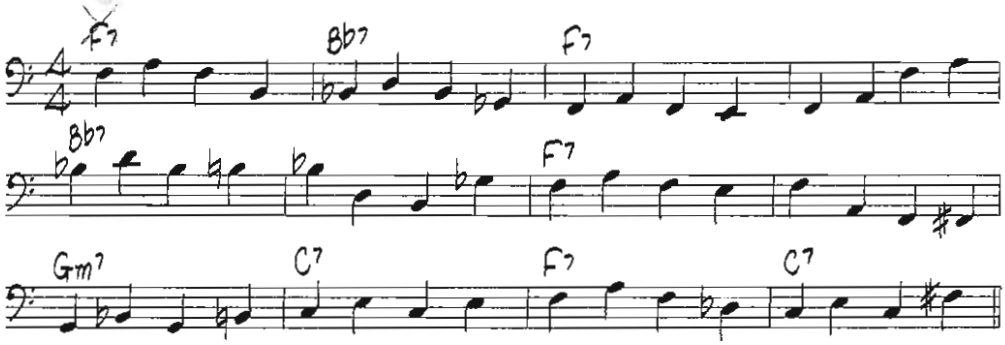


Example #9 Blues bass line using roots and 3rds



In the next example we will use the roots and 3rds plus the half-step leading to the next measure:

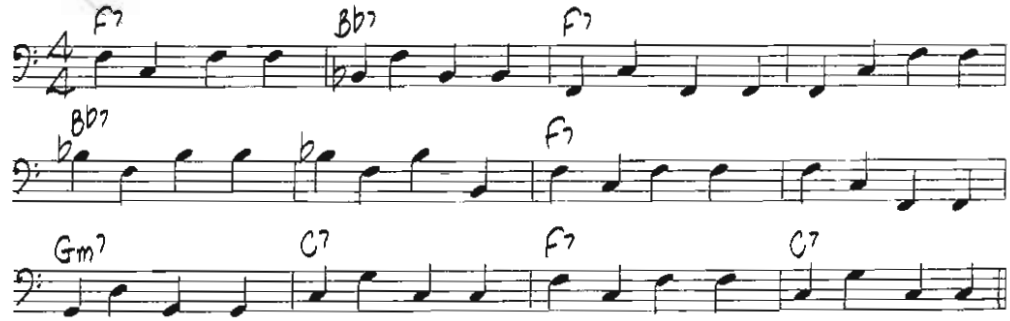
Example #10 Roots, 3rds, and half-steps



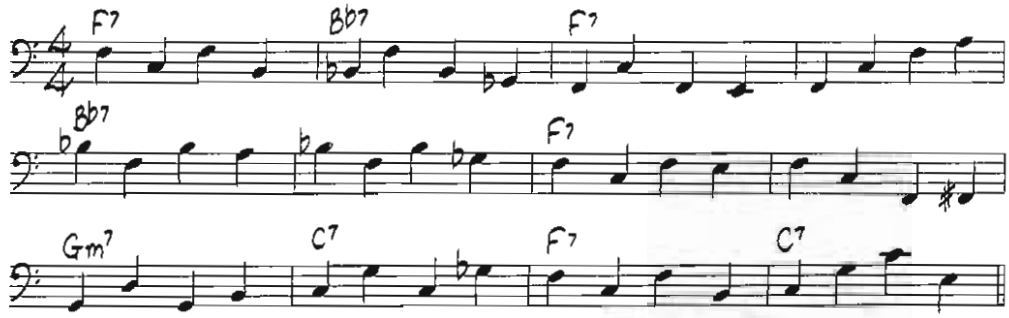
At this point you should begin the practice of transposing each completed exercise by ear to all other keys. Begin by choosing a key which you feel will be easiest, and learn the exercise thoroughly before moving on to the next key. If necessary write out the exercise in the new key. With patience and much practice, transposing by ear will help you develop a sense of freedom when improvising. This practice of transposing is not easy. In the beginning it may take you a long time to learn one blues in all twelve keys. However, this is an extremely important skill — so stay with it.

The next note to add to our blues bass line is the 5th of the chord. Let us place the 5th on beat 2 where before we had the 3rd.

Example #11 Roots and 5ths

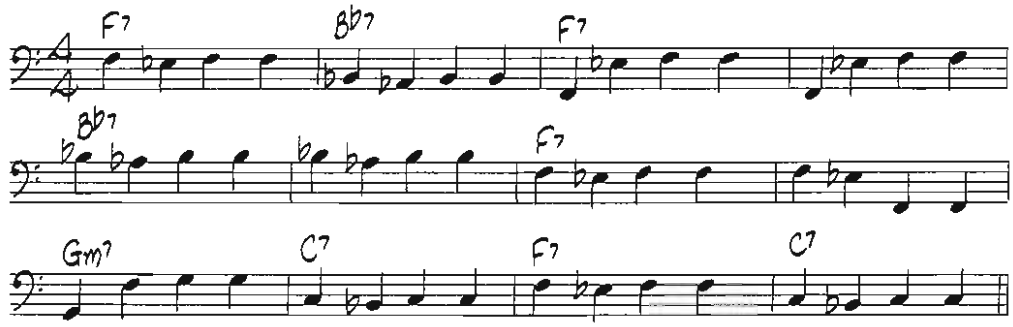


Example #12 Roots, 5ths, and half-steps

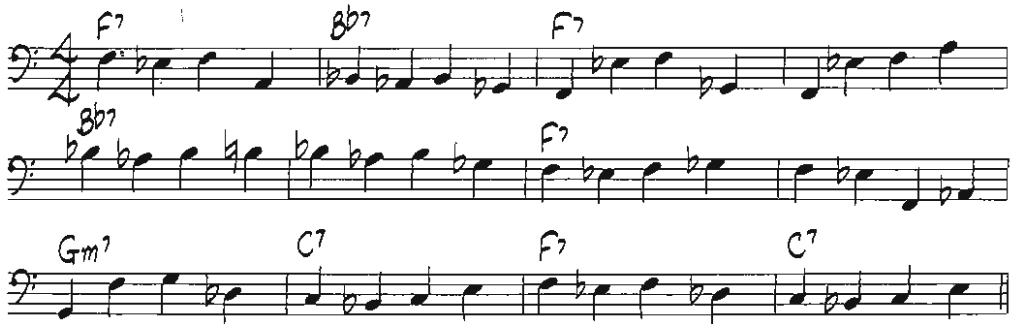


The remaining chord tone is the 7th. In the next two examples we will use the 7th on beat 2 of each measure:

Example #13 Roots and 7ths

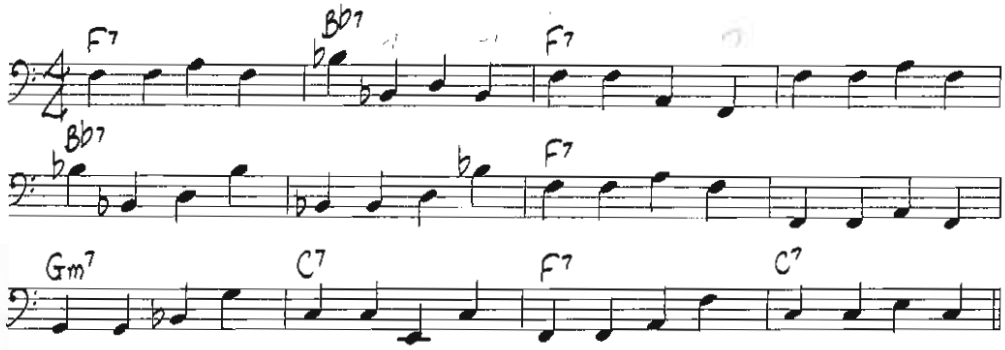


Example #14 Roots, 7ths, and half-steps

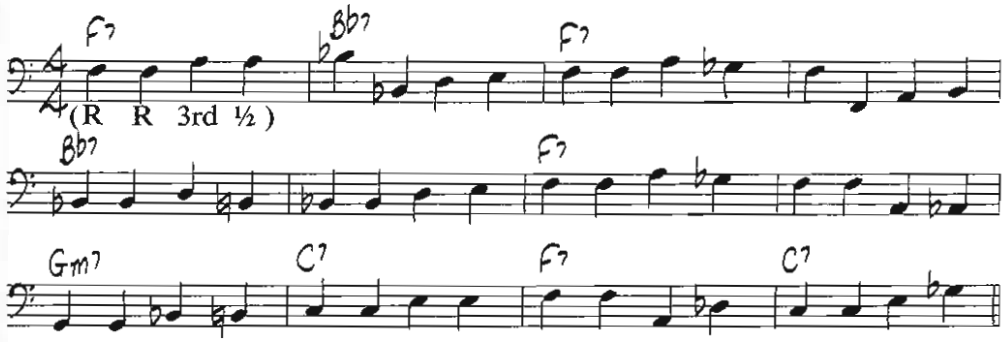


So far we have used: ***roots, 3rds, 5ths, 7ths,*** and ***half-steps.*** It is very important to learn to hear and play this type of melodic movement. The next group of exercises uses these same pitches but arranged differently within the measure. Again I encourage you to memorize these lines and transpose to all keys. Work slowly and thoroughly.

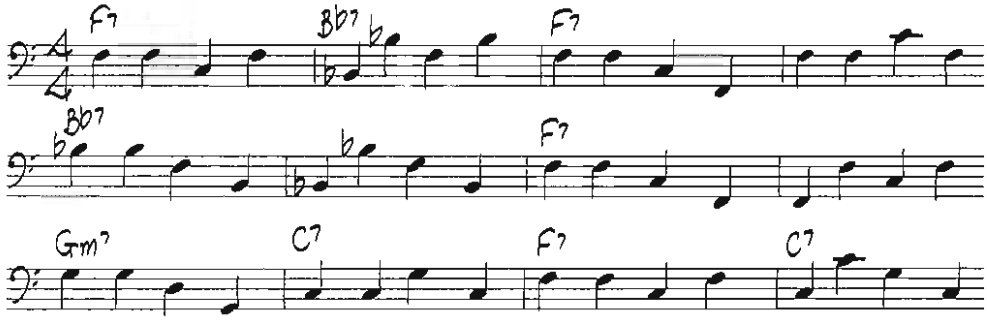
Example #15 Roots and 3rds The 3rd is now placed on beat 3



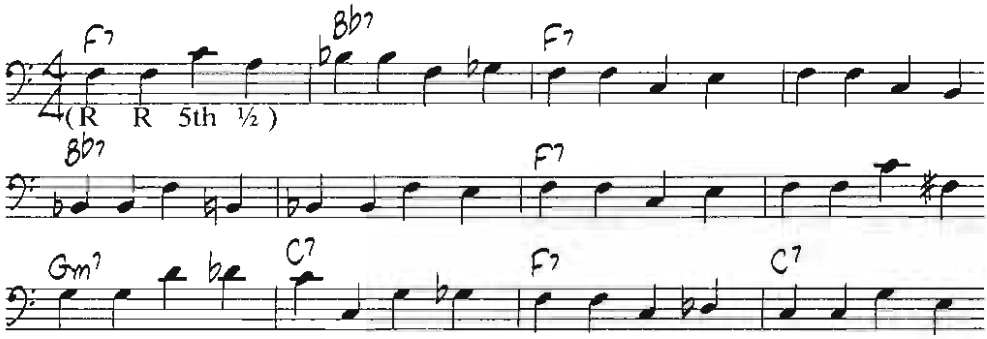
Example #16 Roots, 3rds, and half-steps
The 3rd is on beat 3 and the half-step is on beat 4



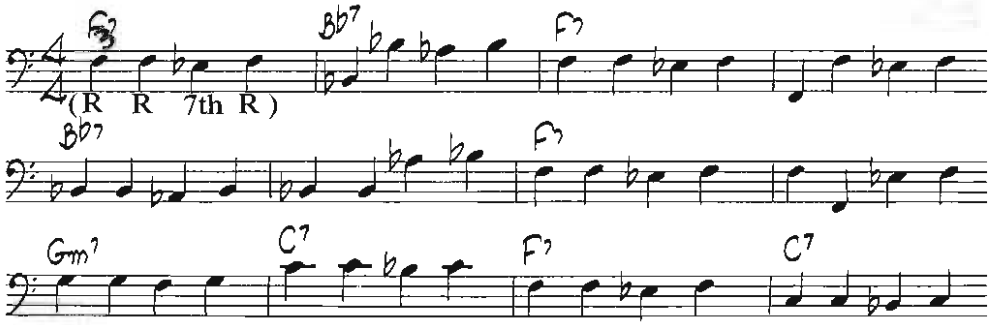
Example #17 Roots and 5ths (5th on beat 3)



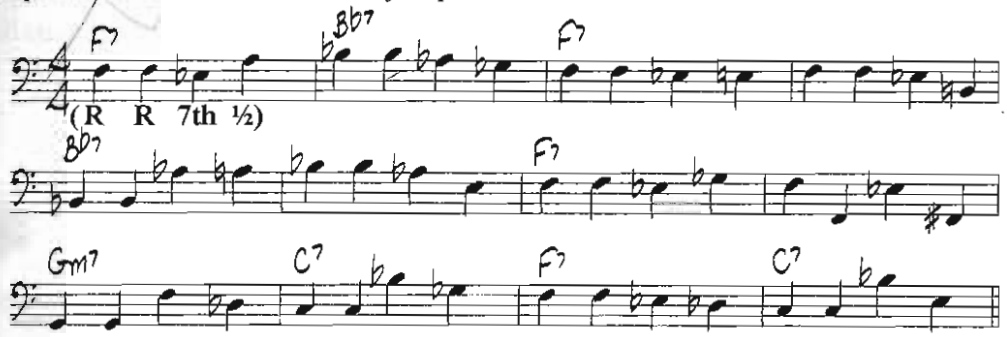
Example #18 Roots, 5ths, and half-steps



Example #19 Roots and 7ths (7th on beat 3)

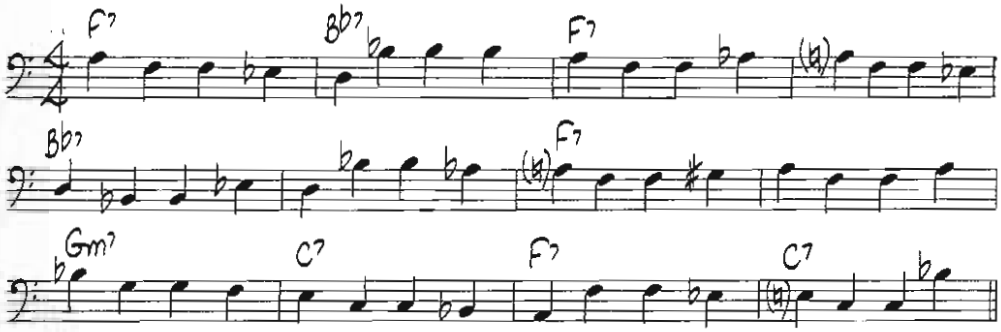


Example #20 Roots, 7ths, and half-steps



In the next four examples I have placed chord tones other than the root on beat 1 of each measure. This is common in a good bass line, but its success depends on what follows in the rest of the measure.

Example #21 The 3rd is on beat 1 with the half-step on beat 4
Notice how the half-step leads to beat 1 of the next measure which is no longer the root of the chord:

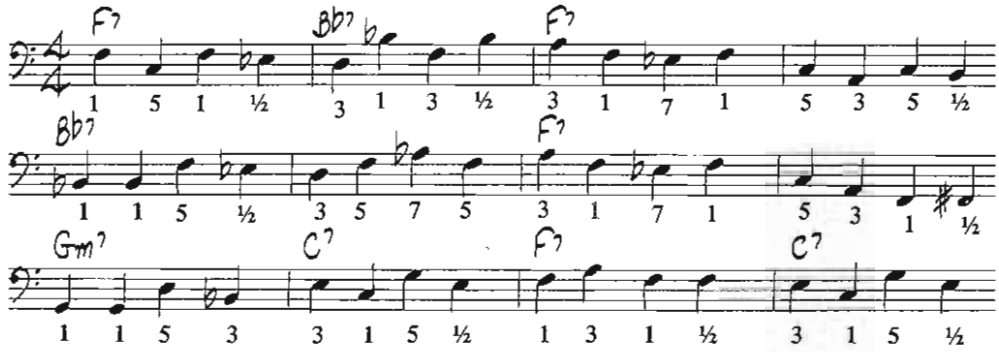


Linke Hand üben !!

1F: 2F: 3F: 4F:

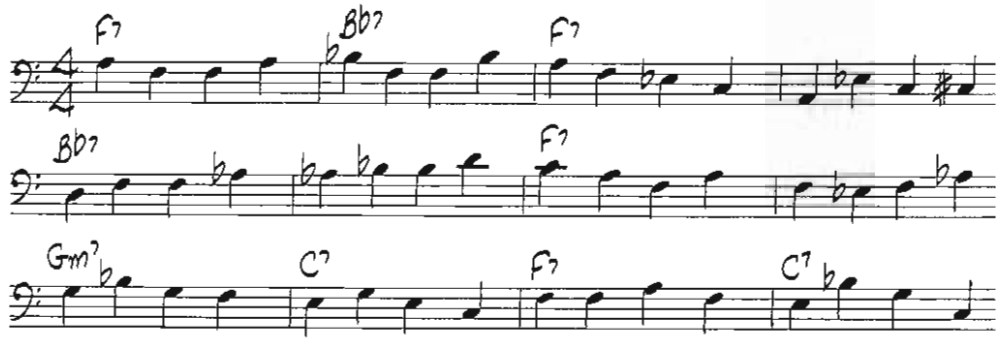
In the following example I have indicated all the numbers (chord tones and half-st for each note. This is only to show how these particular tones are used in a walking bass

Example #22

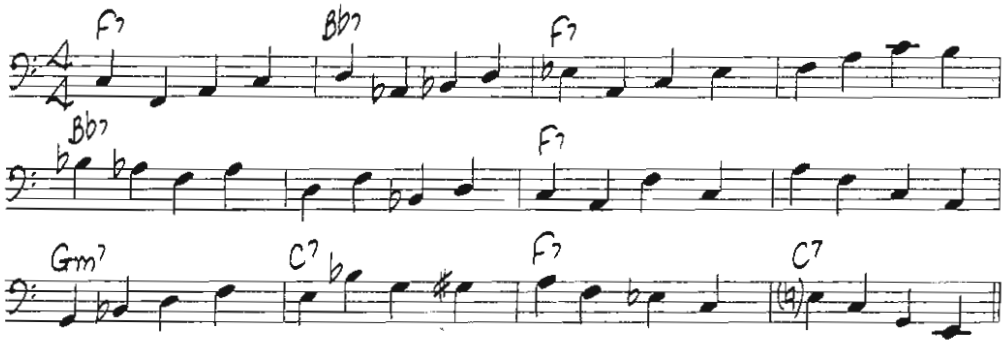


After you have learned to play the next two examples, analyze them to find out wh notes were used.

Example #23



Example #24

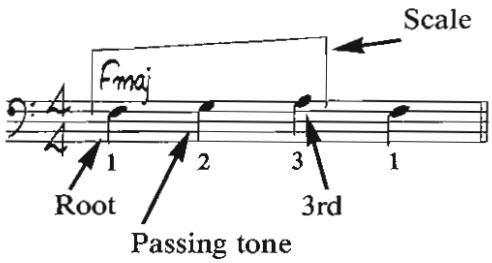


Keep in mind that these bass lines you have learned so far are only exercises. To create a solid and melodic line requires a combination of all these sounds and more. Again I urge you to learn each different pattern thoroughly. Write out on paper your own versions of these lines using all combinations of ***roots, 3rds, 5ths, 7ths, octaves*** and ***half-steps.***

Scales

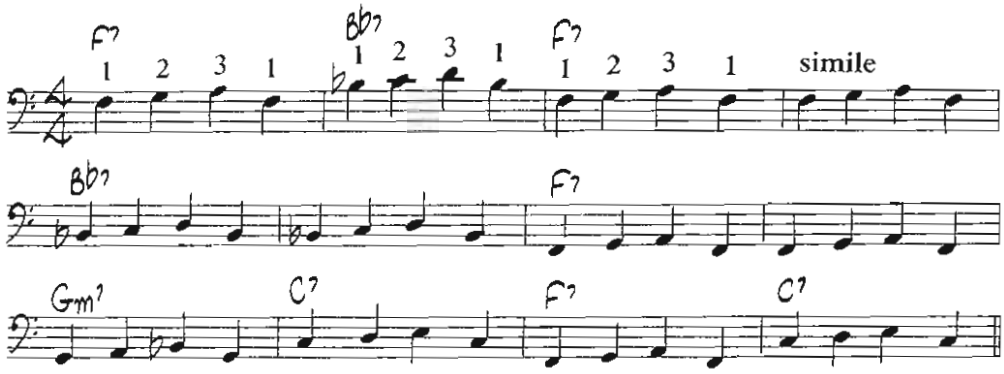
Using scalar patterns is a common way to smooth out a bass line. By their own nature of stepwise motion, scales sound linear — which is often desirable in a bass line. Because of the moving chord changes of a song, usually only a small portion of a scale is used at one time. This becomes (in its simplest form): ***chord tone - passing tone - chord tone.***

Example #25

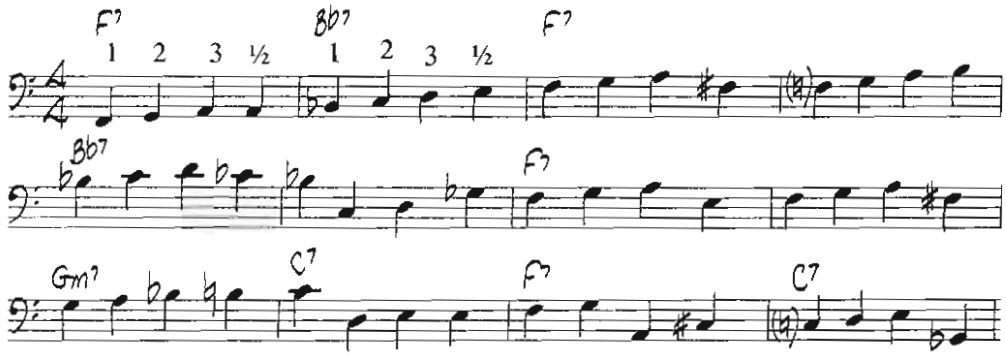


In the next five examples we will use specific scale patterns along with half-steps:

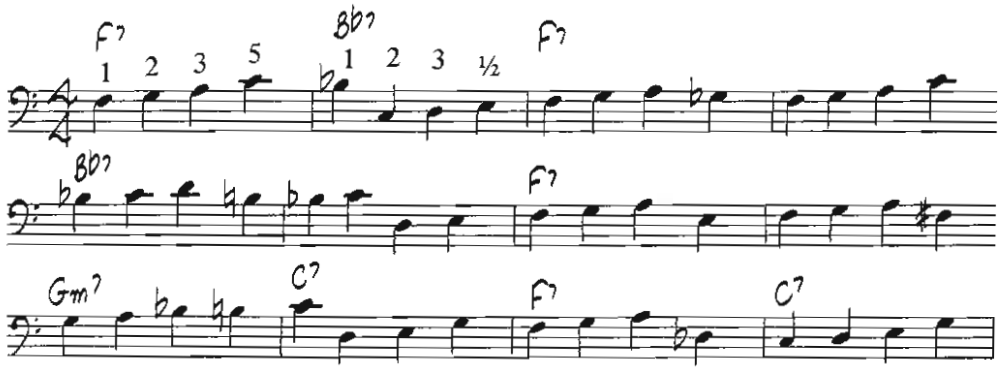
Example #26 Scale steps 1, 2, 3, 1



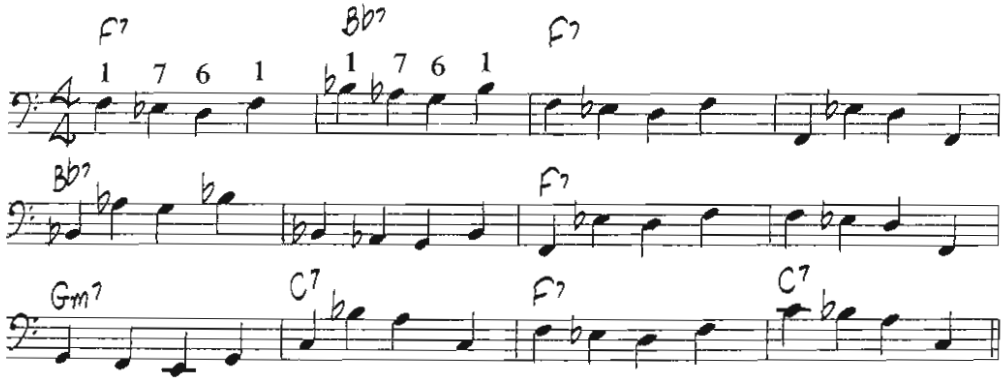
Example #27 Scale steps 1, 2, 3, half-steps



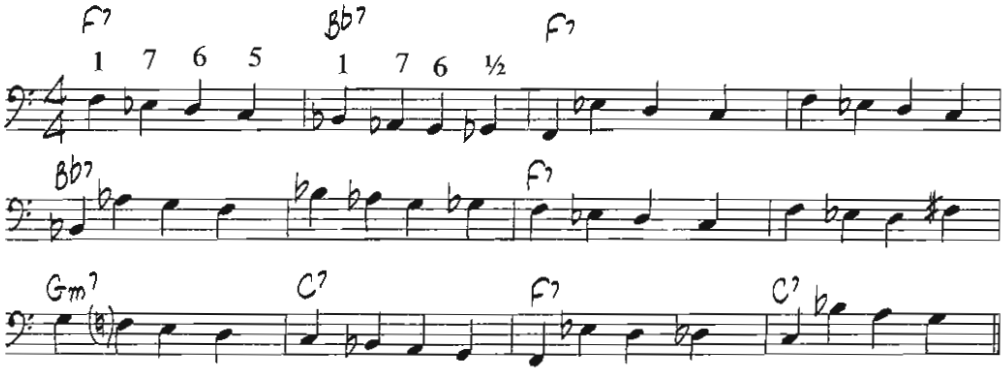
Example #28 Scale steps 1, 2, 3, 5 or half-step



Example #29 Scale steps 1, 7, 6, 1



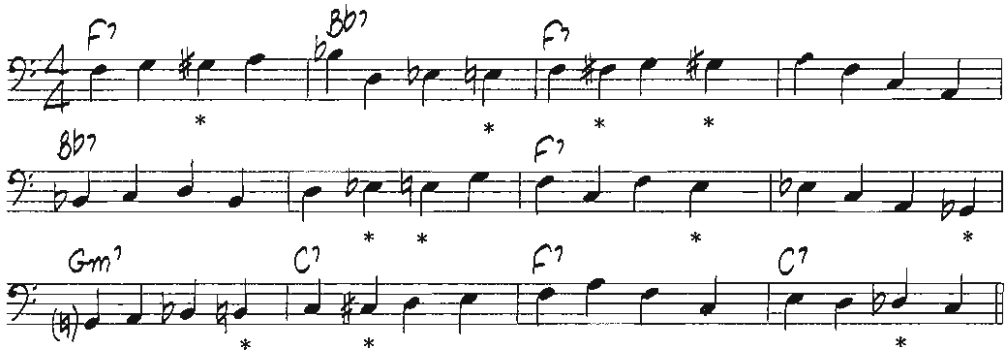
Example #30 Scale steps 1, 7, 6, 5 or half-step



Chromatics

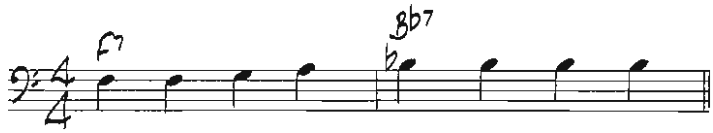
Chromatic notes are generally used within a scale passage or as a leading tone to a more stable pitch. Many of the half-step approach notes we have used are chromatics. Here is an example of some commonly used chromatic notes:

*Example #31 Chromatics**

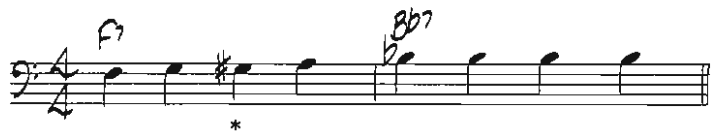


Chromatic notes can be used to suspend the tension created by a moving line. The next examples illustrate how to suspend tension by using chromatic pitches:

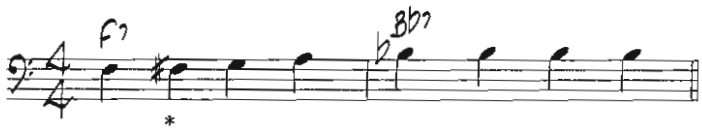
Example #32 (No chromatic)



*Example #32A Chromatic**



*Example #32B Chromatic**



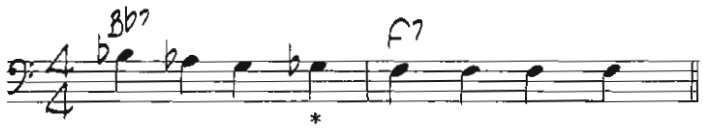
In Example #32 motion is created by the stepwise motion of the last three beats. By adding the G# in Example #32A, the stepwise motion is extended throughout the entire measure. In Example #32B the F# is used to also extend the stepwise motion.

Notice how the G# in Example #32A leads strongly to the third of the chord. This A is the 7th of the following chord and leads more strongly to the root. In Example #32B the F# leads not to a chord tone but to a scale step. This is not as strong a resolution, so there feels a need for continued movement. Both examples 32A and 32B create a strong sense of direction to the next measure.

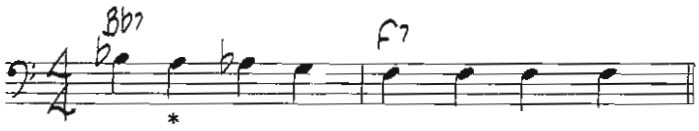
Tension and Release

The use of chromatics enables one to create a stronger *pull* toward a specific point. Where the chromatic is placed in the line determines where the tension is created and then released. The next two examples show a contrast in placement and in turn a difference of where stability, tension and ultimately resolution occurs:

Example #33

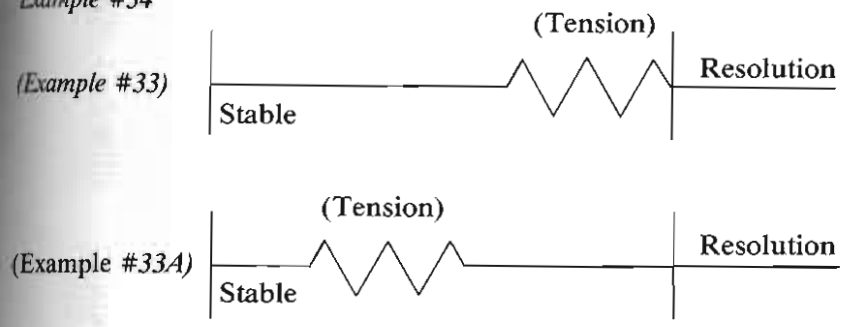


Example #33A



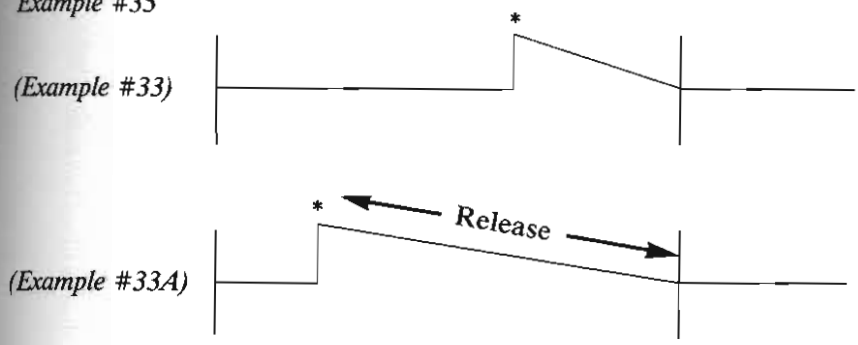
Example #33 uses the chromatic in the last part of the measure, while Example #33A places the chromatic in the first half of the measure. The pattern of ***stability - tension - release*** may be shown in a graph such as the one below:

Example #34



Notice in these graphs the difference in time of the release:

Example #35

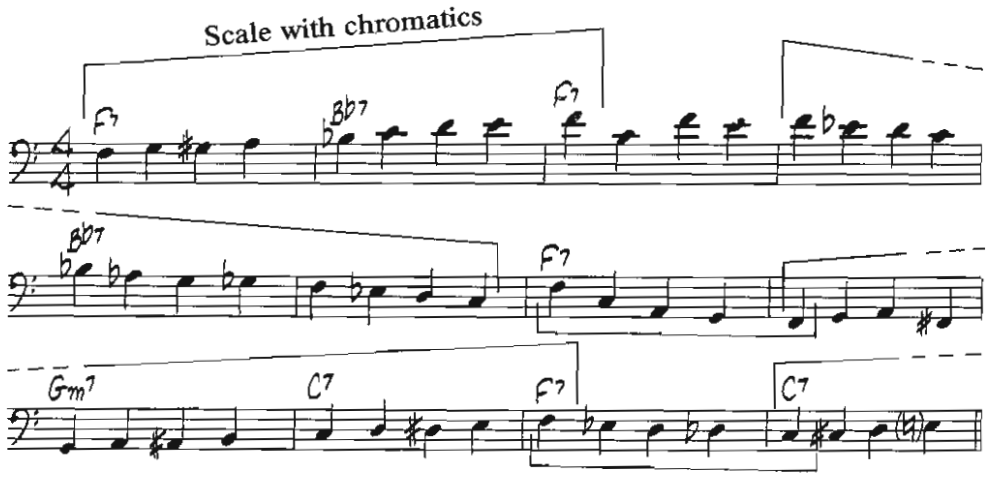


*** = Appearance of chromatic**

In Example #33 the chromatic note appears as the last quarter note. This leaves the first three beats fairly stable in sound with a sudden tension and quick release as the root appears in the next measure on beat 1. However, in Example #33A the chromatic appears in beat 2 and leaves a longer release to beat 1 of the next measure.

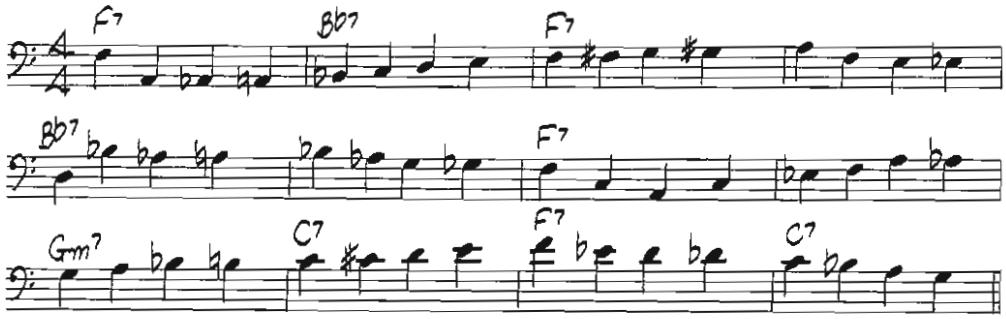
By using scale patterns and chromatics we can create very long linear lines with the te being suspended as we desire. In the next example I have used brackets to show scale passages which may or may not include chromatics:

Example #36

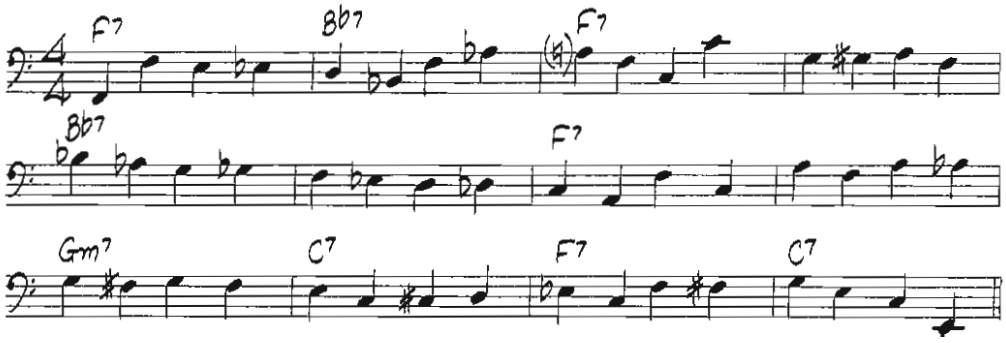


Examples #37 and 38 illustrate some of the more common examples of chromatics in blues lines:

Example #37



Example #38

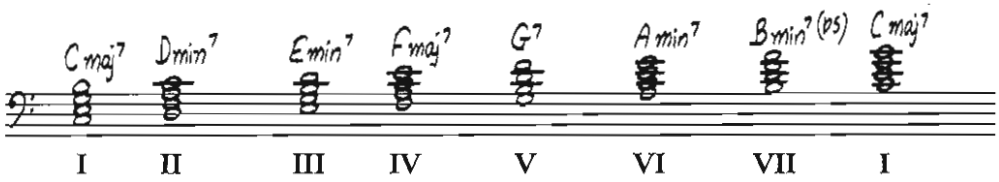


II-V-I

Diatonic Harmony/Seventh Chords

Jazz harmony, like traditional harmony, is derived from chords built on the steps of a scale. These chords are built by stacking notes in thirds on top of each scale degree:

Example #39 7th chords built on the degrees of a C major scale



As you can see, each scale degree has been numbered using Roman numerals.

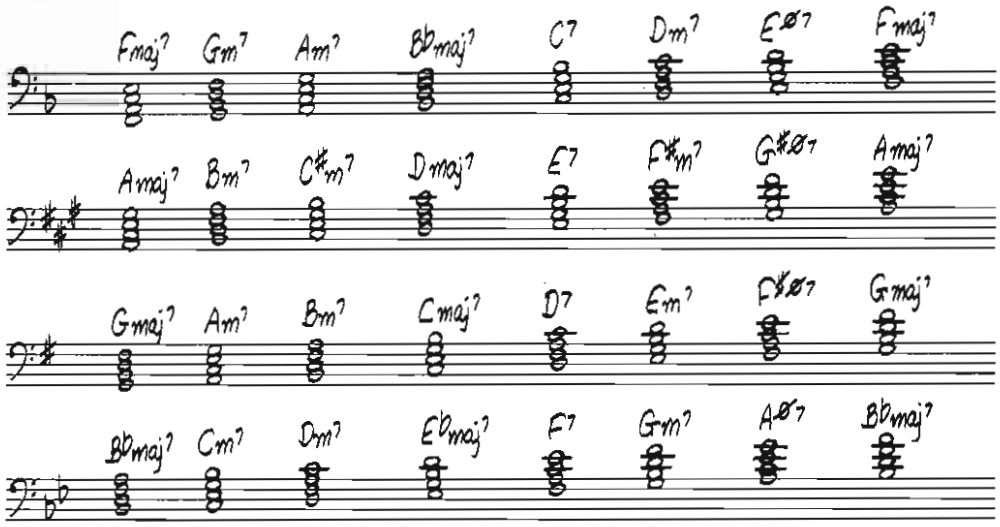
If you spell each of the chords built, you will find the quality of each chord respectiv

I = Major 7 II = minor 7 III = minor 7 IV = Major 7

V = dominant 7 VI = minor 7 VII = minor 7 (b5)

The minor 7 (b5) chord has another name which is commonly used. It is "half diminished" and is written: ø. These qualities remain the same for chords built on any major scale. Only the letter names change for each scale.

Example #40 Chord qualities in various keys



The same arrangement of chords and qualities is true for all of the other major scales as well.

When various chords from a scale are played in a sequence, this is called a "chord progression". ***Harmony*** is the general name given to all types of chord progressions.

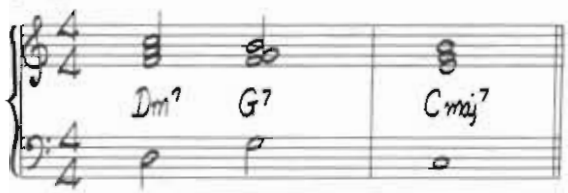
In harmony there are some chord progressions that are more common than others. In jazz a very common chord progression is the movement from a IImin7 to a V7 to a Imaj7. This is a very strong progression as it leads to the I chord which is a point of rest. Movement away from a point of stability and back to a point of rest is called a ***cadence.*** II-V-I is a common jazz cadence. This pattern of chords can be found in abundance in standard jazz tunes. This specific chord progression is used even more frequently by jazz musicians when improvising. Often this pattern is implied in a jazz solo, even when these specific chords are not present in the accompaniment.

As a jazz bassist it is most important to learn the sound of the II-V-I progression and be able to play a bass line over these chords with ease in all keys.

Piano Voicings and Tensions

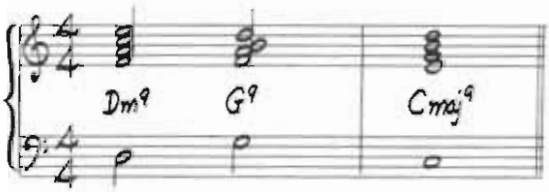
The following is a II-V-I in the key of C major. Go to the piano and play these chords

Example #41 II-V-I progression

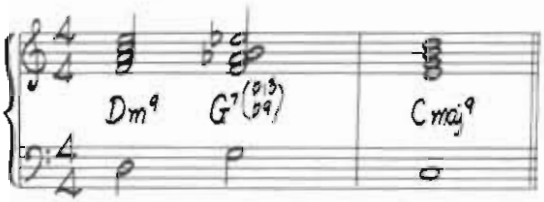


Common among good jazz pianists is the use of tension and altered notes when voicing a chord. The following three examples illustrate some of the more standard voicings a jazz pianist might use when playing a II-V-I progression. I have added the bass note in the lower staff. Play this note with the left hand while playing the chord in the right hand. Listen to the sound of the total sonority:

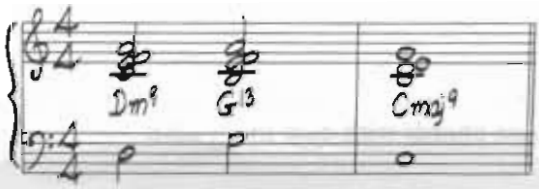
Example #42 II-V-I (jazz voicing)



Example #43 II-V-I (jazz voicing)

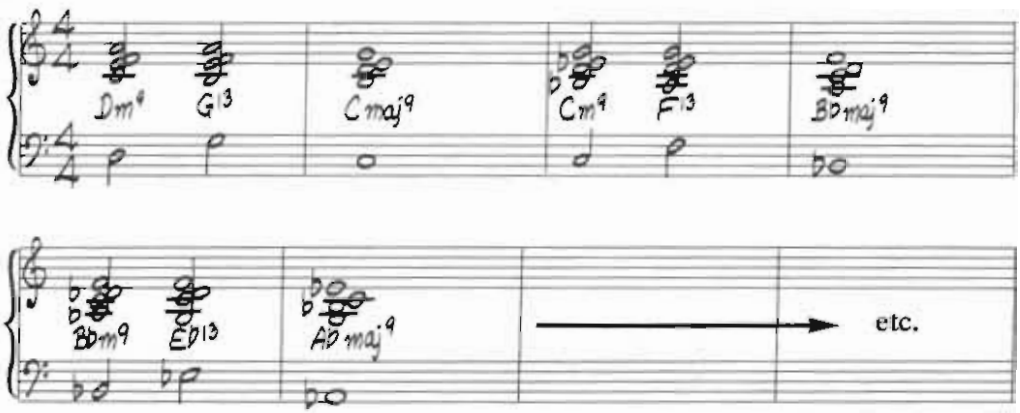


Example #44 II-V-I (jazz voicing)



Learning to recognize the sounds of these chordal movements will be invaluable in ultimately creating good sounding bass lines. I strongly suggest that you learn to play examples 43 and 44 on the piano. Here is one procedure for practicing these II-V-I progressions in all keys:

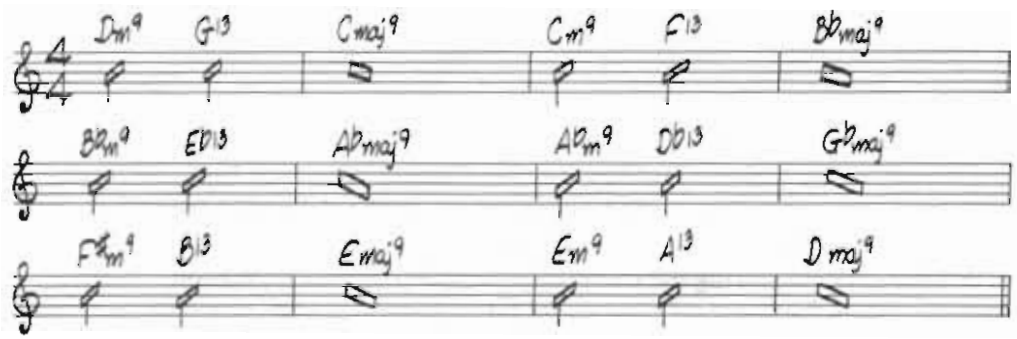
Example #45 II-V-I in all keys



For those of you who may not have any prior training on the piano, this task may seem impossible. If you work at it slowly and consistently the benefits will be greater than you can imagine at this time. Always practice in time and strive for accuracy. The maxim should always be "quality, not quantity".

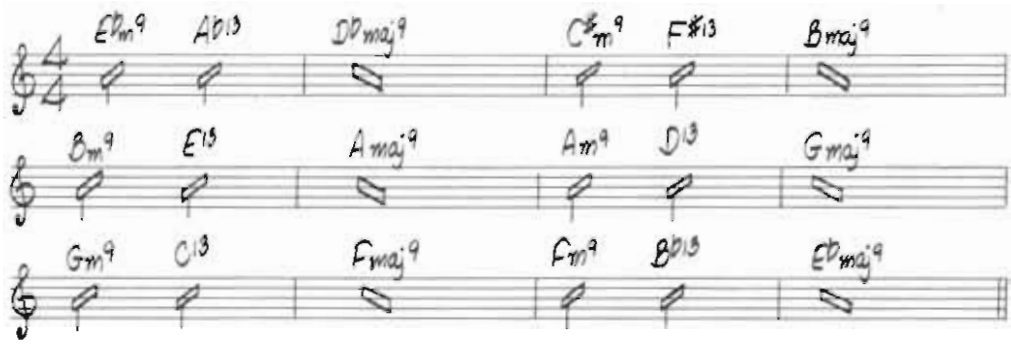
Example #46 is written as chord changes would be notated for the piano. Practice the voicings from both examples 43 and 44.

Example #46 II-V-I (chord chart)



To play the chord progression in the other six keys start on Eb and follow the same procedure

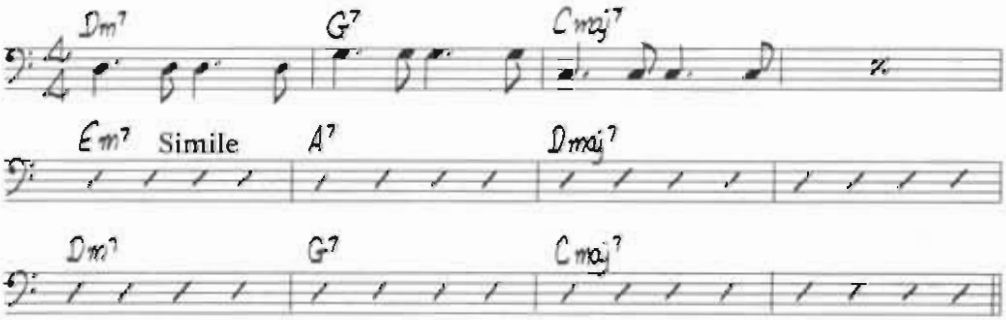
Example #47 II-V-I (chord chart)



Bossa Nova

Let us start the II-V-I exercises playing in the Bossa Nova style with roots only. The basic rhythm pattern for Bossa Nova is a dotted quarter note followed by an eighth note.

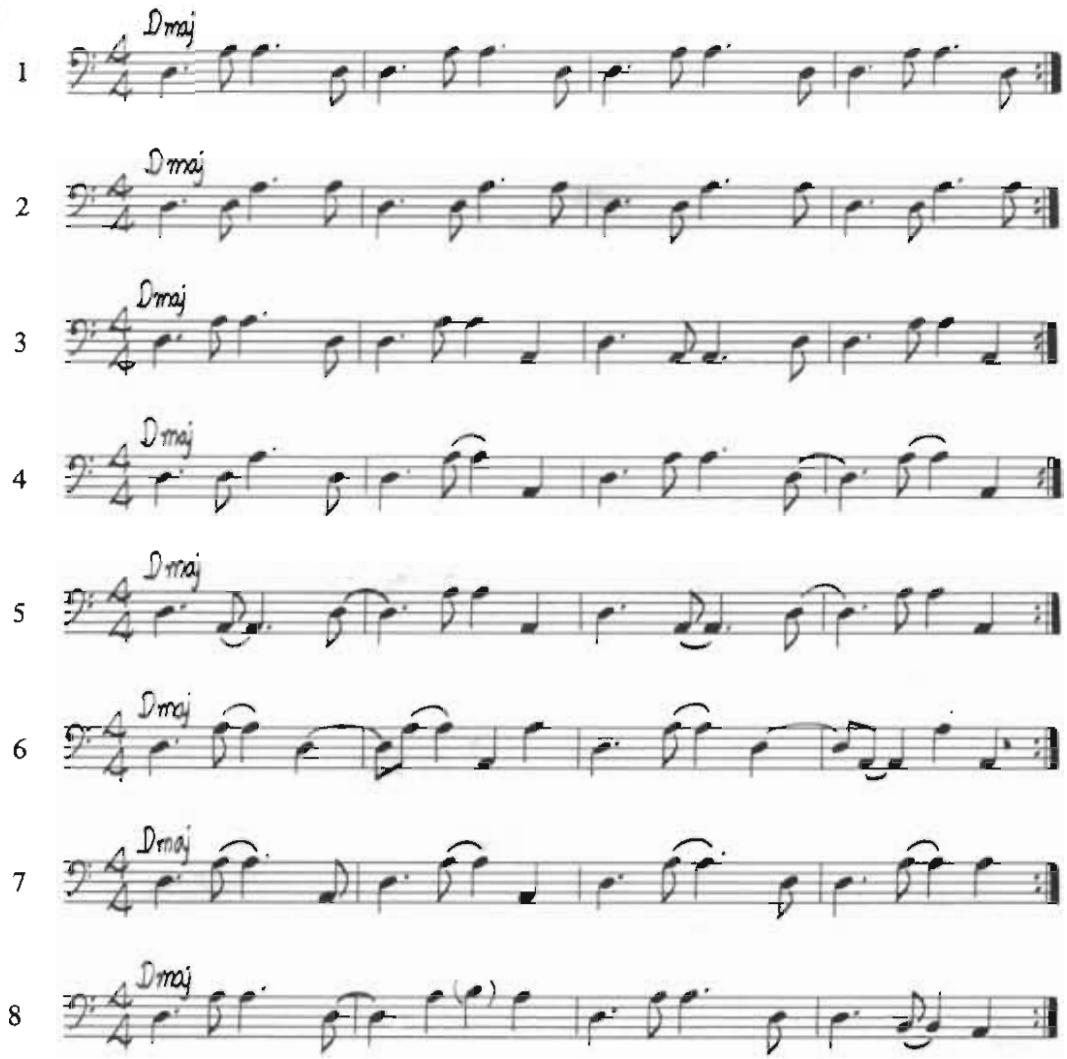
Example #48 II-V-I roots only Bossa Nova



At this stage it would help immensely if you could find someone to play the chords along with your bass line. The goal is to learn the sound of the II-V-I and the different patterns of movement for II-Vs in general. Recognizing the sound of a particular chord progression is how a good bass player functions.

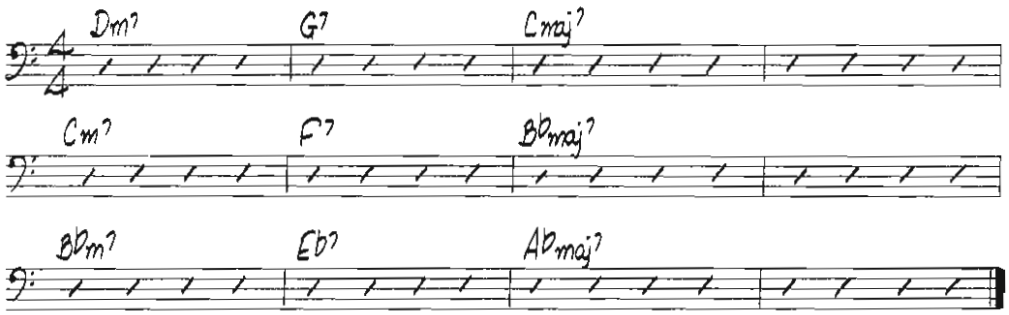
Here are some common variations on the basic Bossa Nova bass line:

Example #48A

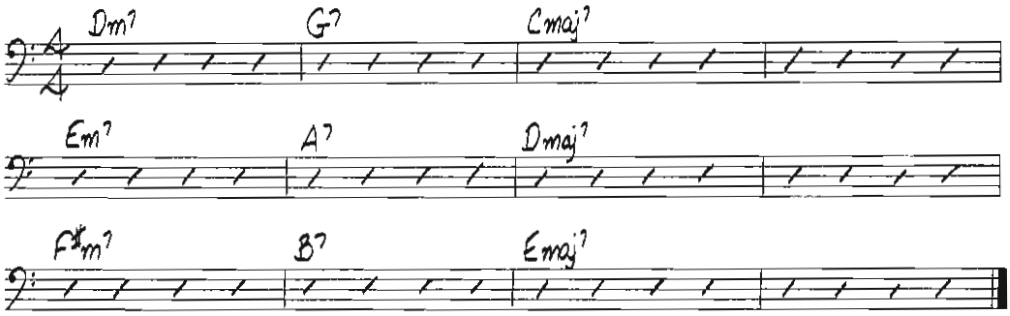


In the following examples stay with roots only. Concentrate on the chord movement and the time. If you are playing alone, try to hear the sounds of the chords in your head.

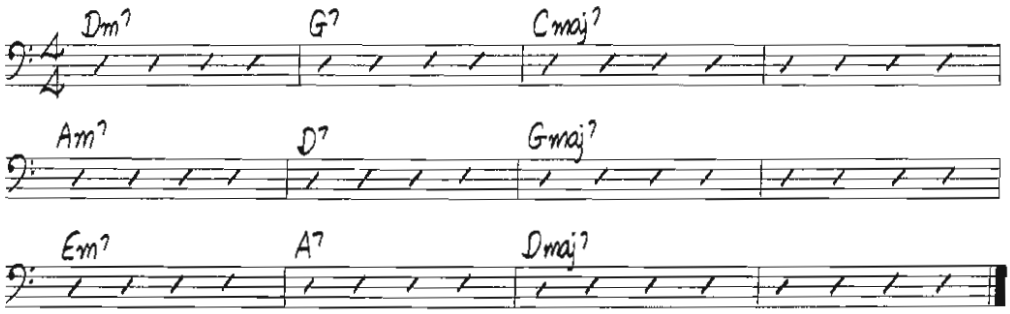
Example #49 II-V-I



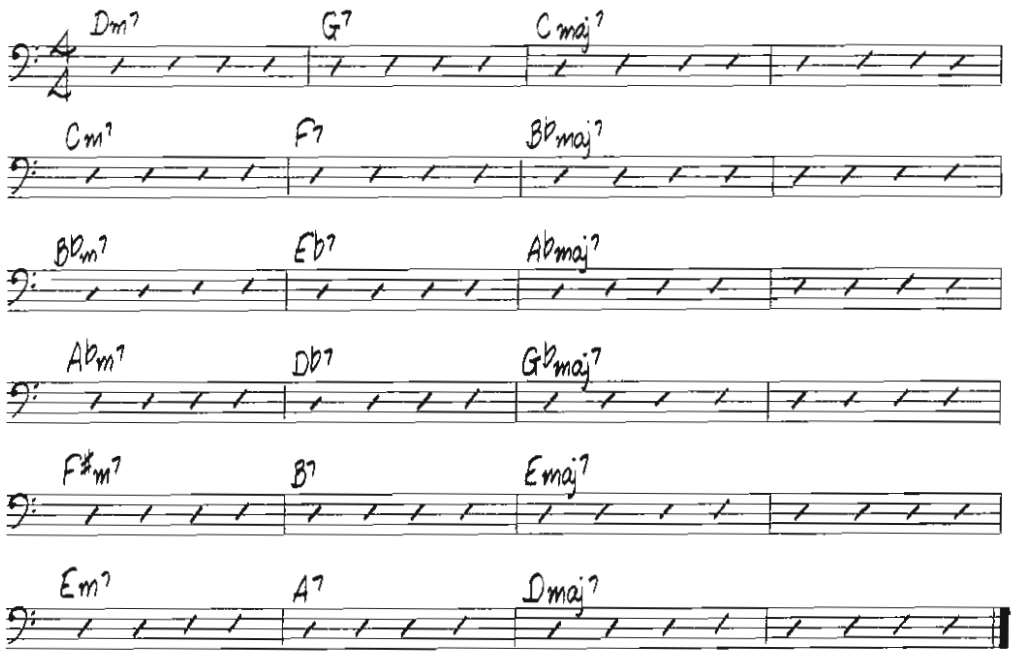
Example #50 II-V-I



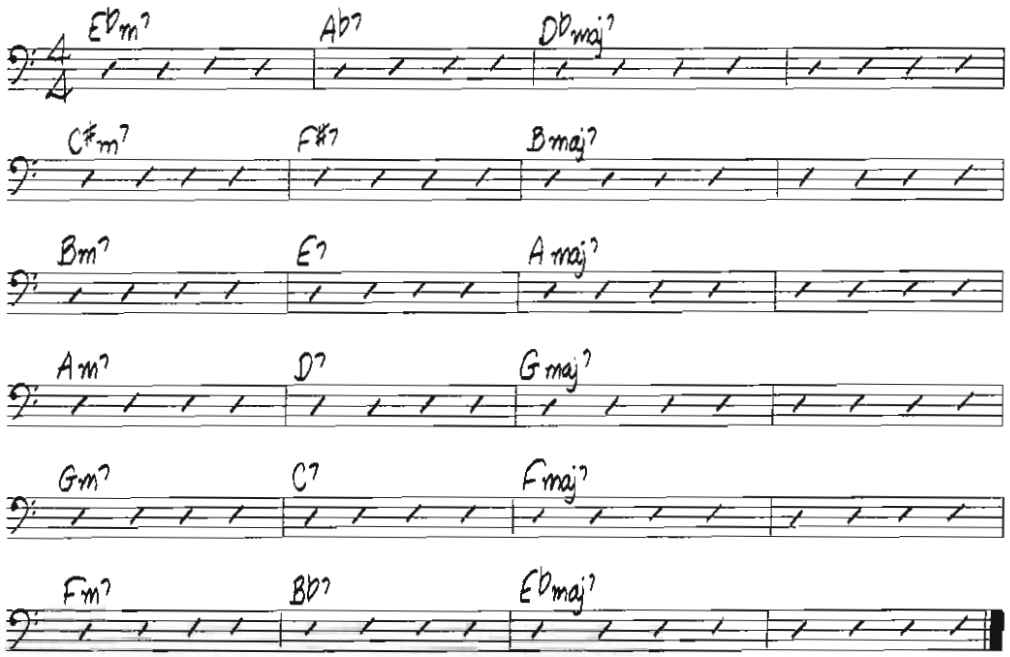
Example #51 II-V-I



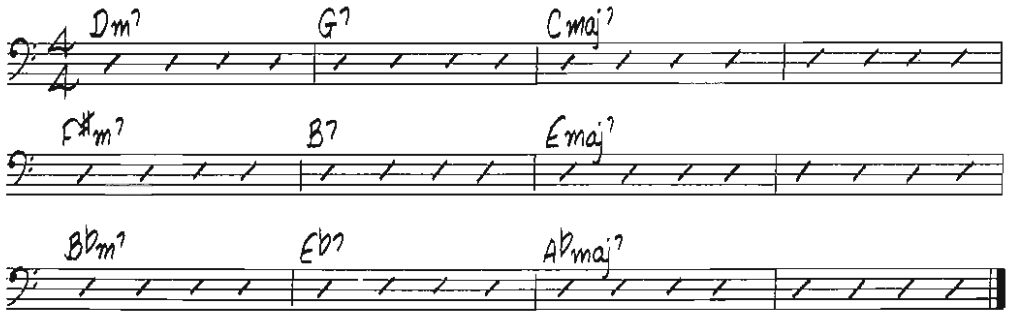
Example #52 II-V-I



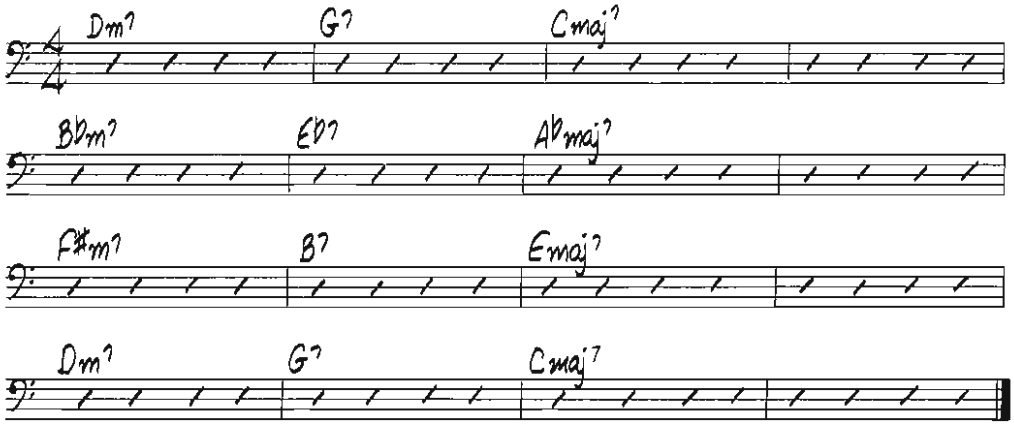
Example #53 II-V-I



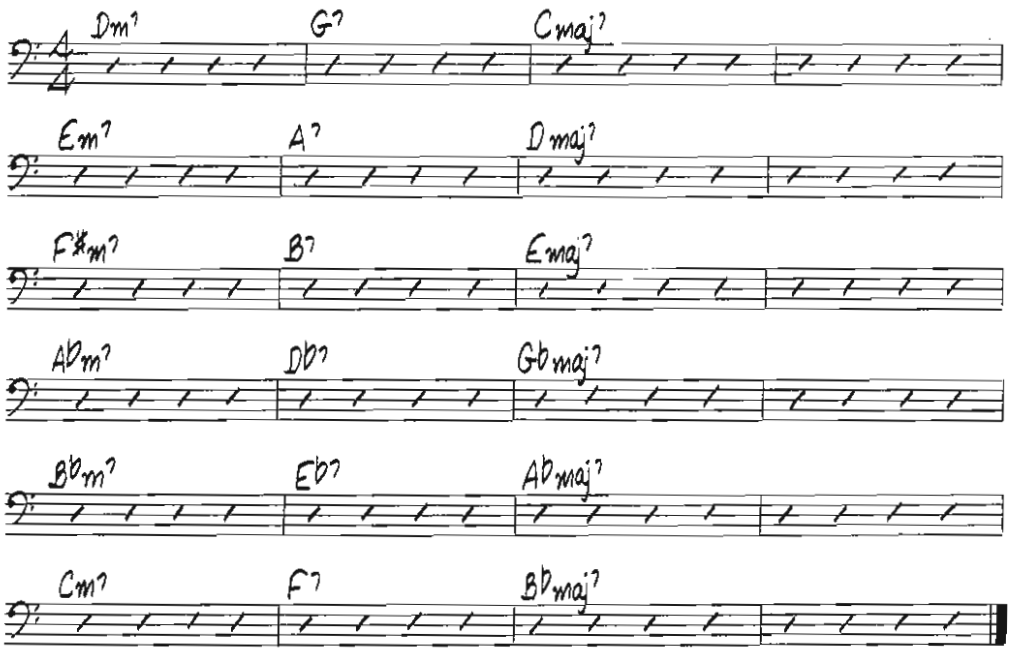
Example #54 II-V-I



Example #55 II-V-I



Example #56 II-V-I

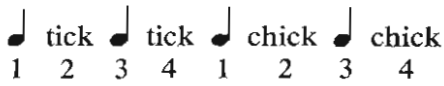


Two-Beat Swing

The next group of examples are also based on the II, V, I progression but played in a Two-Beat style. In a jazz setting this two-beat is commonly used in the first chorus or two of a tune as a preface building to a walking four-four. This style is epitomized in Ray Brown's playing with Oscar Peterson on recordings made during the 1950's and 1960's. Scott LaFaro also often played in two with Bill Evans, but with a much different feel. This type of playing led to what is now commonly called a "broken time feel".

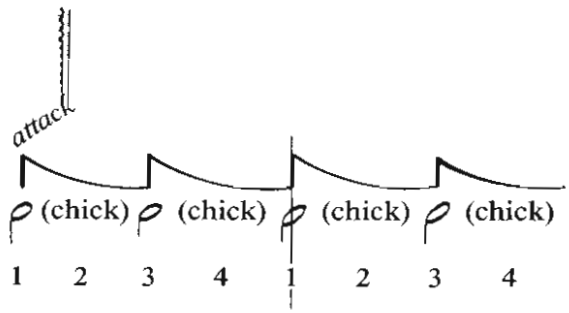
Playing in two is exactly the same as walking in four, but with less notes. When playing two-beat it is important to make the time flow linearly. You must feel the time on all beats even though you are not playing all the beats. If you can swing in two, four-four will come easily. For this reason I suggest you practice playing in two.

When playing the following examples use the metronome ticking on beats 2 and 4. At first this may be difficult, but go slowly. Imagine the ticks as hi-hats:



Let your bass notes ring until the next note is played. If you could see the sound it might look like this:

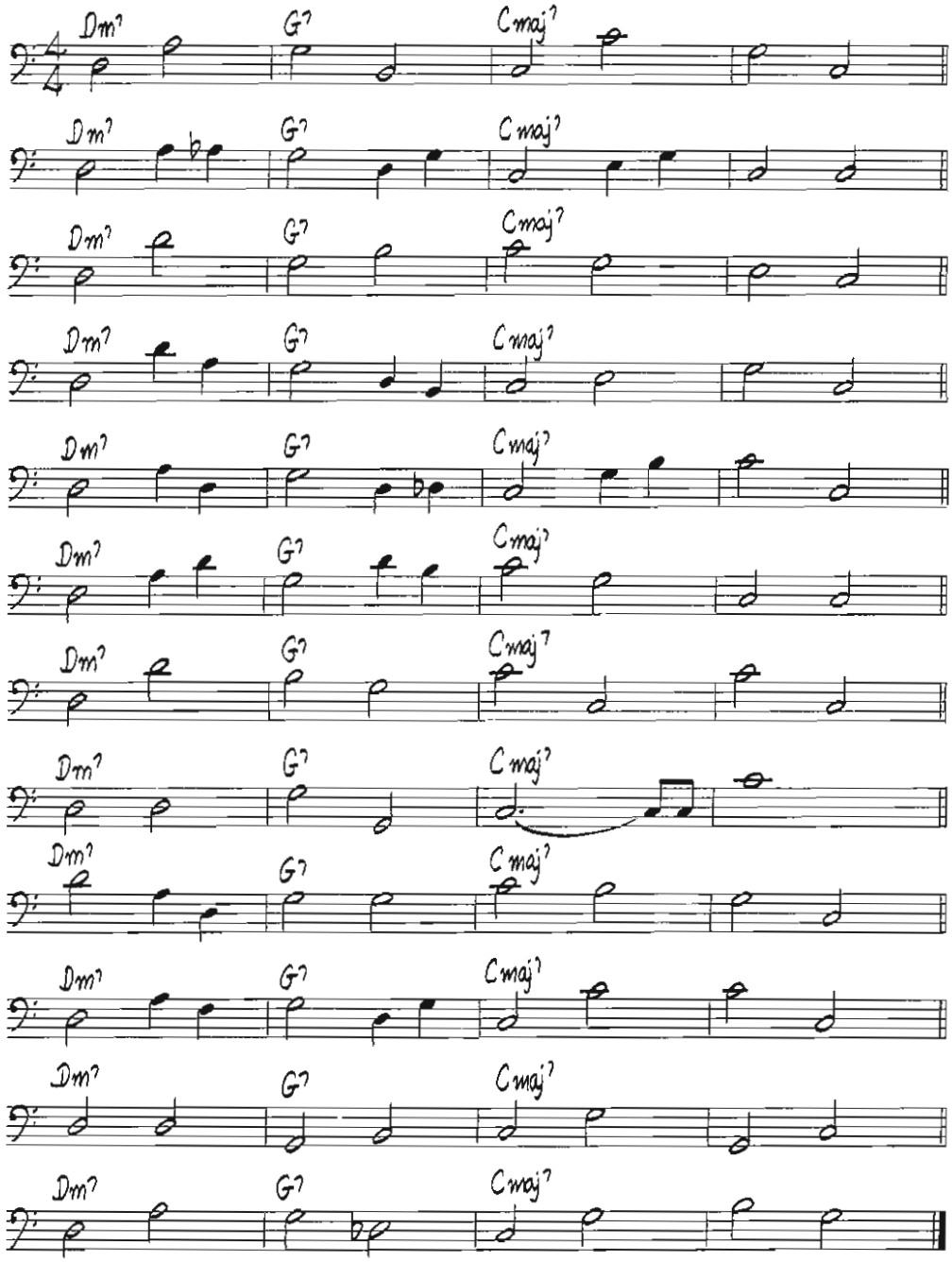
Example #57



Notice the continuous line of sound. This sustaining sound will help to maintain the linear flow of the energy

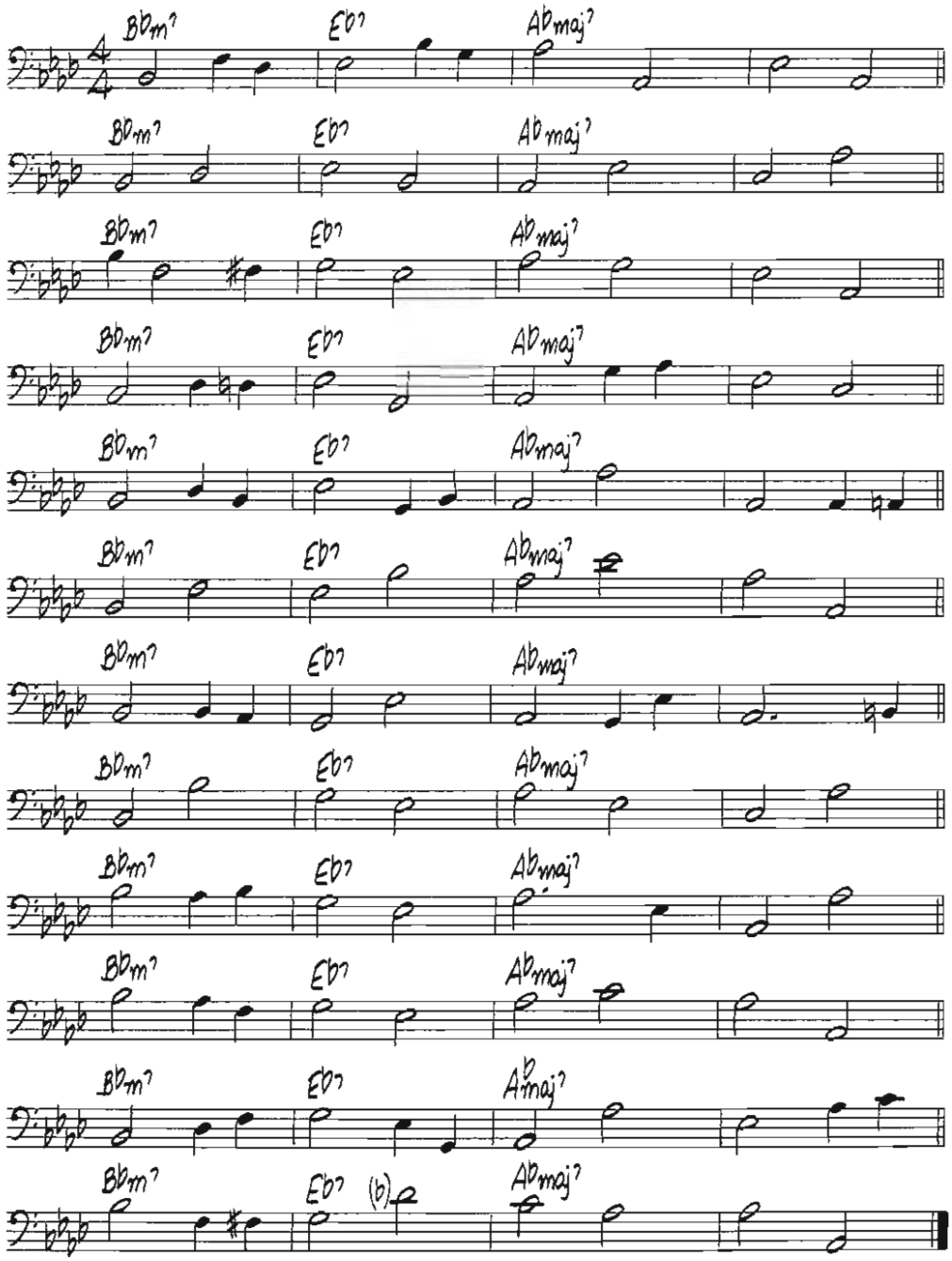
Play all of the following two-beat exercises with the metronome ticking on 2 and 4. Notice how the use of quarter notes in various places effects the overall motion of the line. Depending on where the quarter notes are placed, the emphasis can be shifted around between measures or chords. Often the quarter notes simply lead into the next chord change.

Example #58 Two-Beat (II-V-I) Chord tones and half-steps



The next exercise is similar to the previous one, but in a new key and with slightly different placements of the quarter notes.

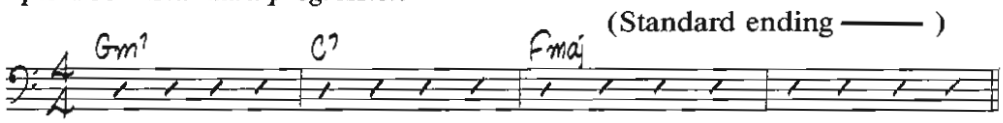
Example #59 Two-Beat (II-V-I) Chord tones and half-steps



Turnarounds

Turnaround is a jazz term which defines a series of chords. A turnaround is similar to a cadence, but with one very important difference. A cadence usually leads to a point of rest. A turnaround ends with a feeling of needing to go on. When used at the end of a song or phrase a turnaround helps to continue the harmonic motion, typically for a soloist to play another chorus. Turnarounds are used in many situations to create tension which releases into the next phrase. Example #60 shows how a turnaround might be used in a standard jazz tune:

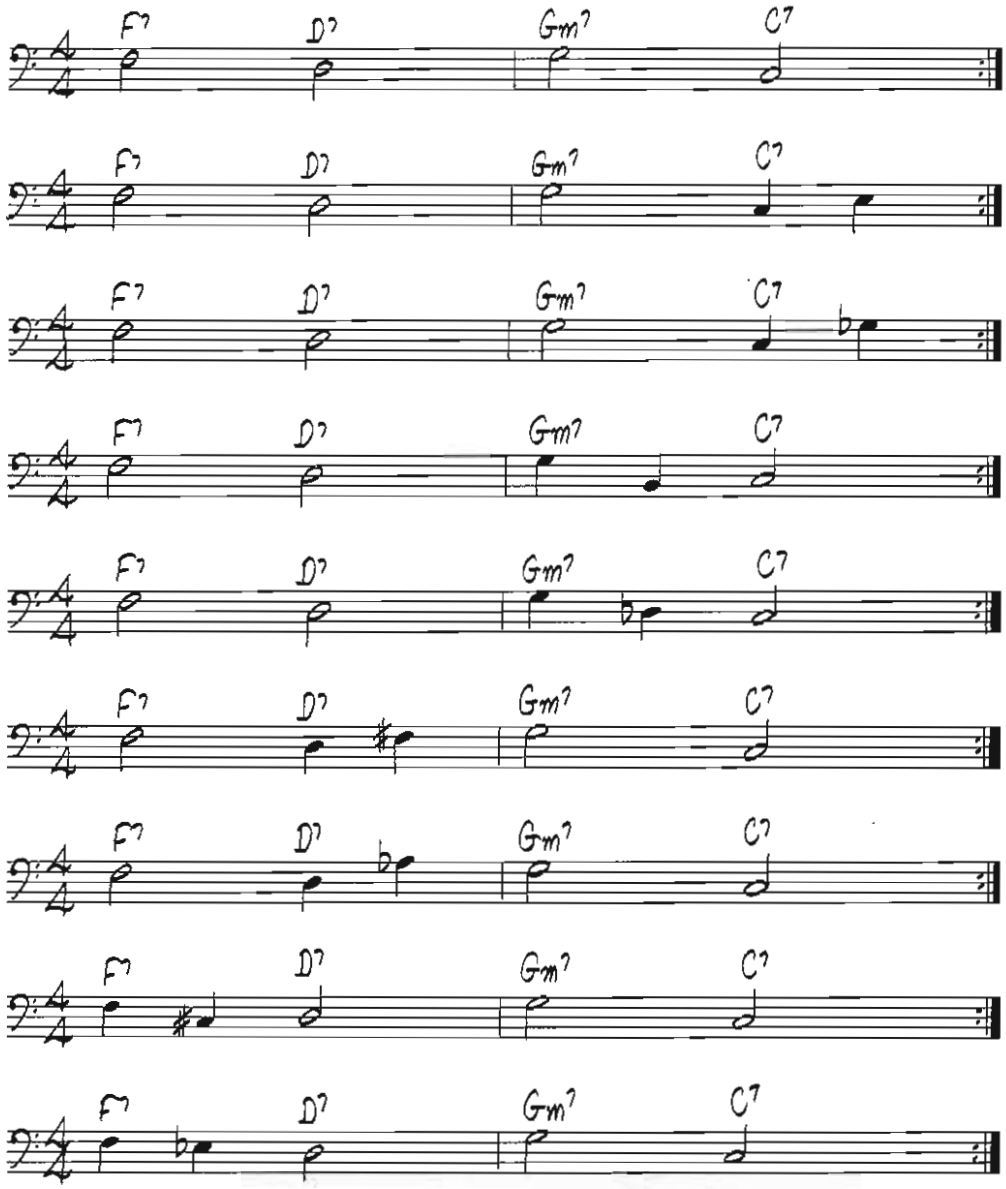
Example #60 Standard progression



Example #60A Turnaround

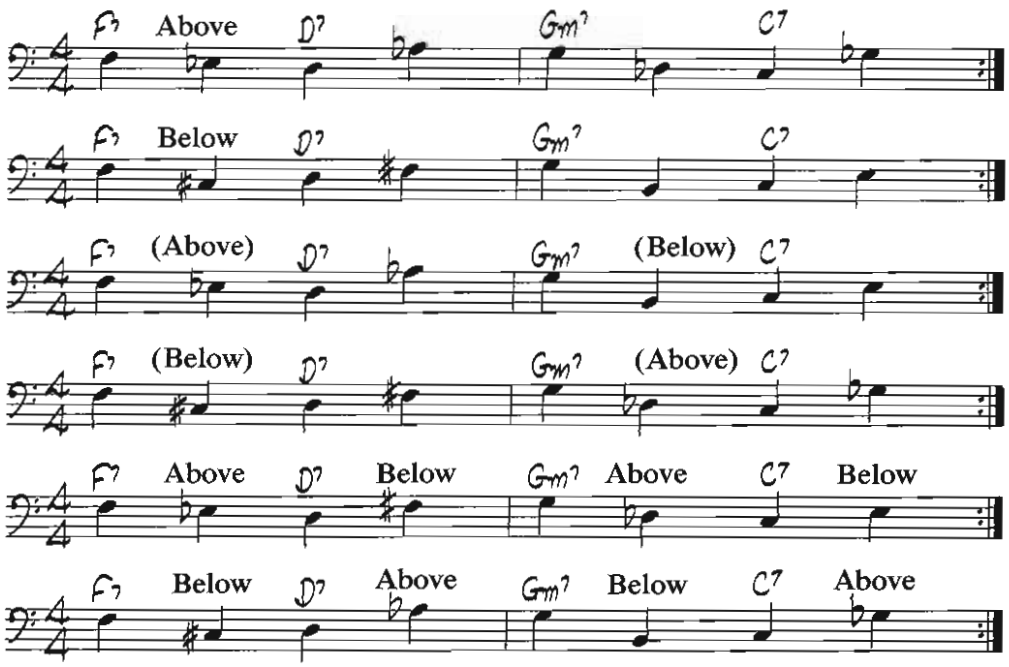
The next set of examples show a turnaround played in a Two-Beat style. Practice these exercises until you can play the entire group nonstop. Notice how the different placement of the quarter note half-step changes the feel of the turnaround.

Example #61 Turnarounds, two-beat, chord tones and half-steps
(Remember to use the metronome on 2 and 4)

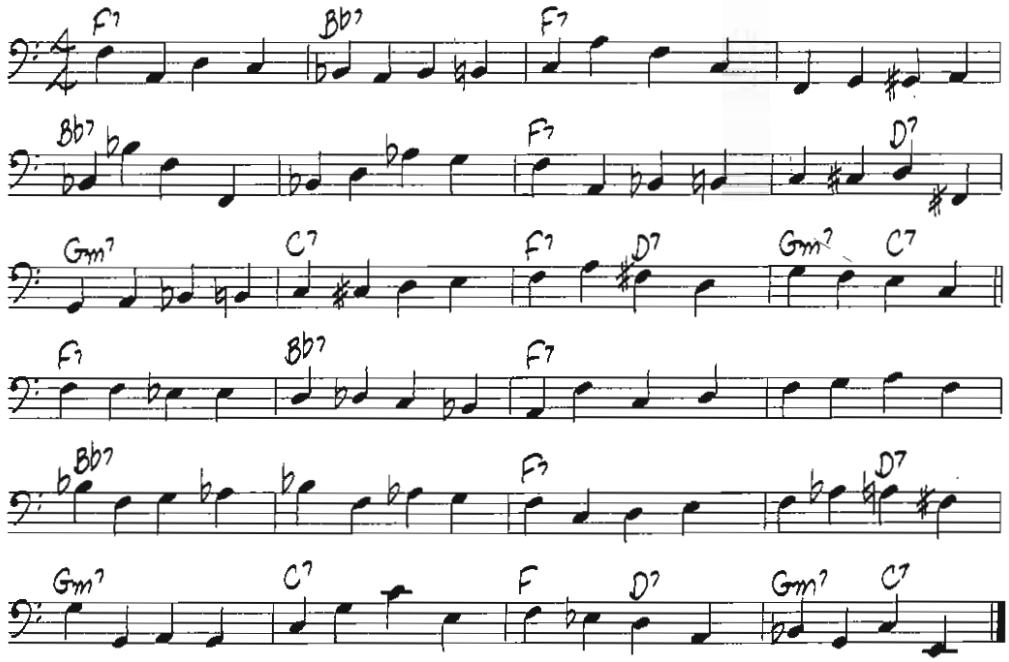


The various placements of the quarter notes and half-steps in Example #61 give an indication of the wide range of possibilities available when improvising a bass line. An improvised bass line probably would not be played with the choices layed out so orderly, but a good bass player would be capable of using all the different choices at will. More important than playing all of the different variations of a bass line is knowing when to use a specific note or rhythm to embellish the line. The great bass players can very subtly add a note or change a pitch of a repeated pattern to create just the right amount of tension. In general, the great players do use all of the different possible note and rhythm combinations — but very sparingly. It is easy for the student to make his bass lines sound cluttered and unsteady by using too many devices. A rule of thumb for the student is "the more simple, the better". By listening to recordings and live music played by good players, you will develop a natural feel for when to add or take away from your lines.

Example #62 Turnaround with roots and half-steps



Example #63 Blues with turnaround



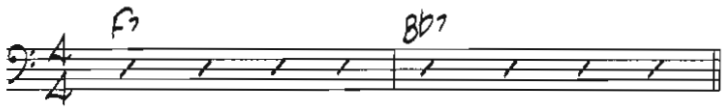
Substitute Chords

Substituting chords is a common practice in jazz. Often existing chords are replaced by different chords. This may be done for any number of reasons. Sometimes additional chords are added to create more harmonic motion, just the same as when using a turnaround. There are many situations where the use of specific substitute chords have become standard procedure. The following examples will illustrate two of the most common situations where substitute chords are used. . .

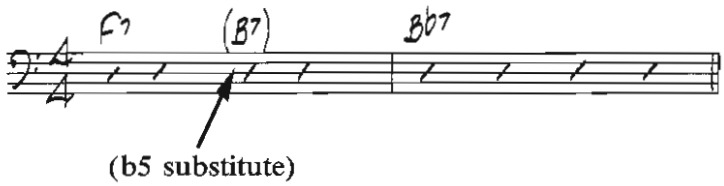
Flat V Chord

In jazz the single most common harmonic movement is that of an ascending 4th. This type of chord progression is where the b5 substitute can be used:

Example #64 Standard progression



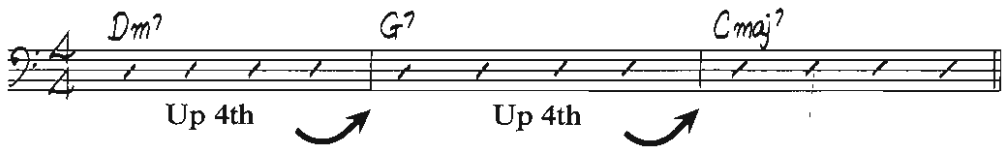
Example #64A With substitute



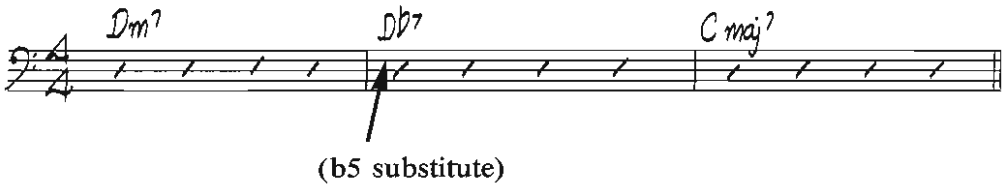
In the previous example notice that the B7 chord which is substituted for the F7 (a flatted 5th away) is also a half-step leading into the Bb7 chord. This creates a strong pull to the Bb7.

The Flat V substitute can also be used in a II-V-I.
Again the root movement of the chords is ascending 4ths:

Example #65 Standard progression



Example *#65A With substitute*

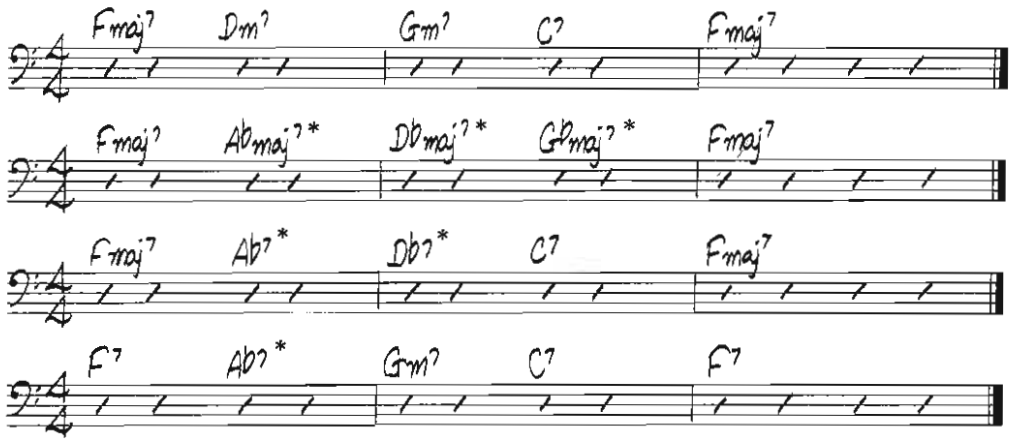


By using the Db7 instead of the G7 a chromatic motion is created from D to Db to C.

Most commonly the Flat V substitute is a dominant chord replacing another dominant chord such as that used in a turnaround.

Flat V substitutes are used in different qualities and in many different situations. The following example shows the b5 as a dominant chord and a major 7 chord:

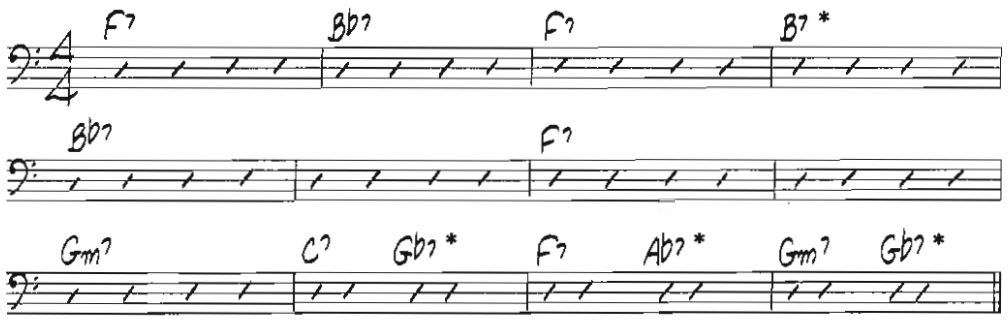
Example #66 Turnarounds with various substitute chords



These are just a few possible combinations of b5 substitutes in a turnaround.

In a blues progression the Flat V substitute is used frequently. Example #67 shows how the b5 might be used in a blues:

Example #67

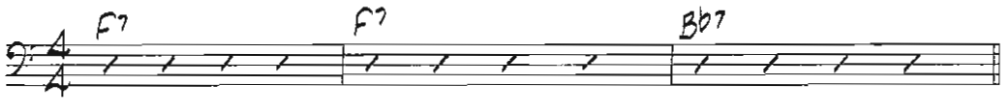


* Flat V substitute

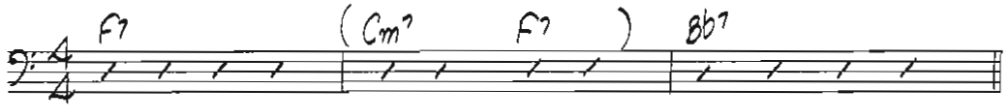
II-V Substitutes

Very common in jazz is the addition of a II-V chord progression where otherwise there is no chordal movement. This type of chord substitution creates motion. Sometimes the rhythm section plays these substitute changes and the soloist improvises accordingly. Other times the soloist may imply these chords with the accompaniment, choosing not to play the substitute chords.

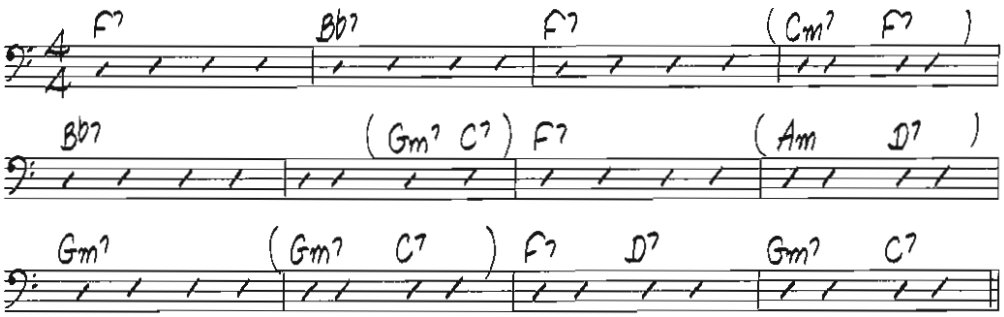
Example #68 Standard progression



Example #68A With substitute



Example #69 Blues with substitute II-Vs

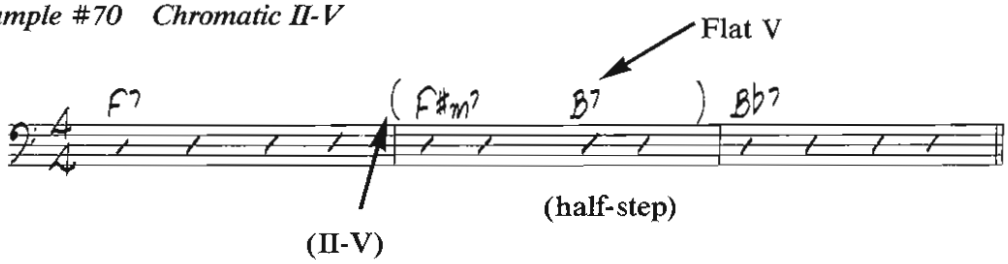


Chromatic II-V

The Chromatic II-V is a unique but strong approach. To build the Chromatic II-V simply place a II chord in front of a Flat V substitute chord. We now have a II-V, but it does not lead to the I chord as in a standard II-V-I chord progression. Instead the Chromatic II-V resolves chromatically down by a half-step.

The fundamental difference between the Chromatic II-V and the Flat V is the amount of tension created. The Flat V substitute can be quite subtle, while the Chromatic II-V is very noticeable.

Example #70 Chromatic II-V

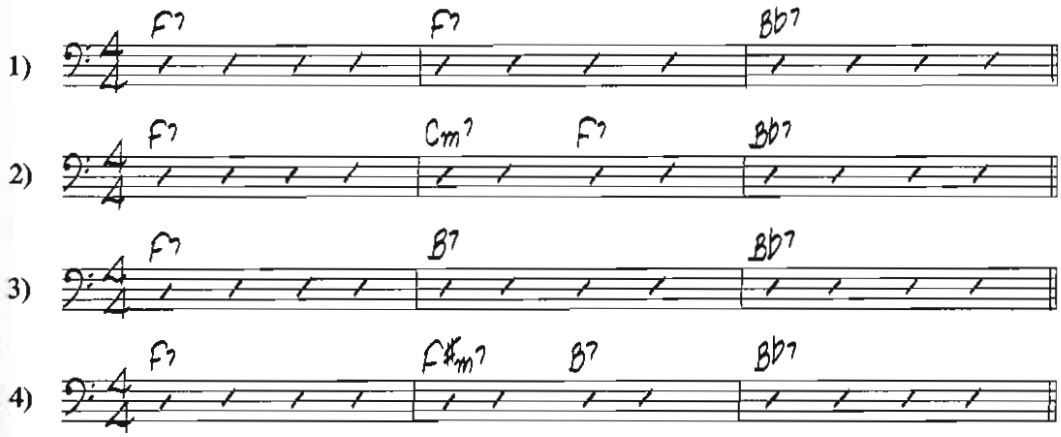


With the Chromatic II-V the II chord is not always minor. It is common for the II chord to be a dominant 7th chord as well.

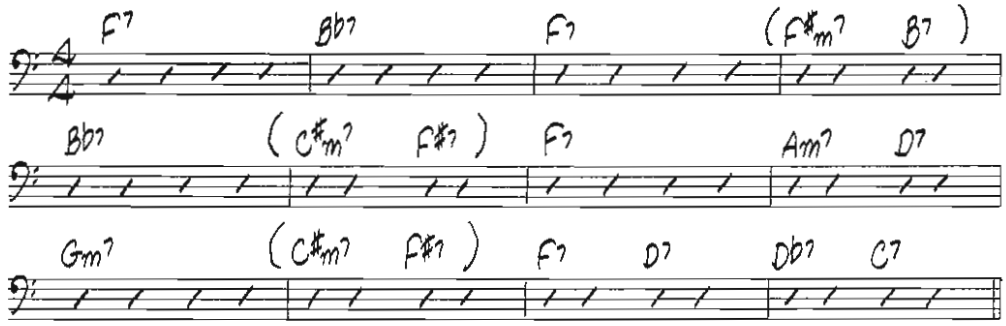
The following example shows:

1. Standard progression
2. II-V substitute
3. Flat V substitute
4. Chromatic II-V substitute

Example *#71 Substitute chords*

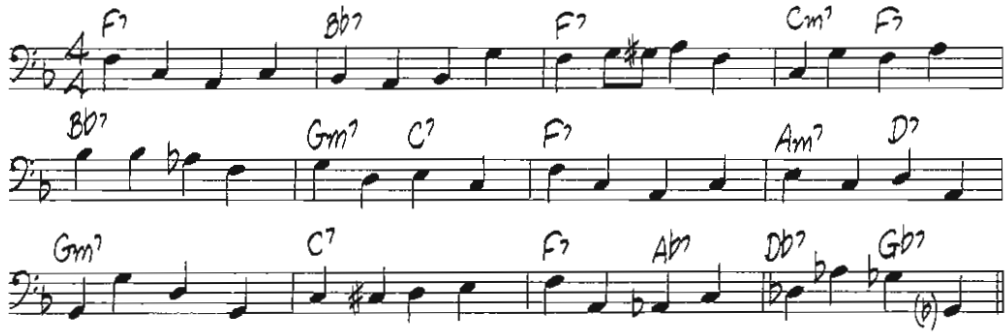


Example #72 Blues with chromatic II-Vs

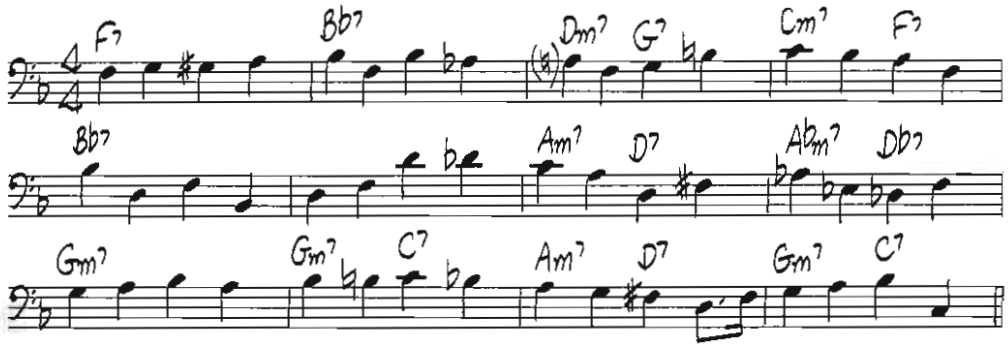


The following set of blues choruses illustrate the use of various chords substitutions:

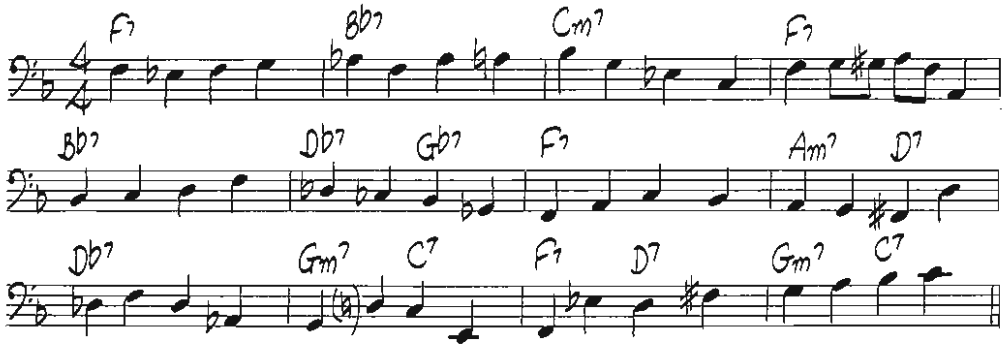
Example #73 Blues with substitute chords



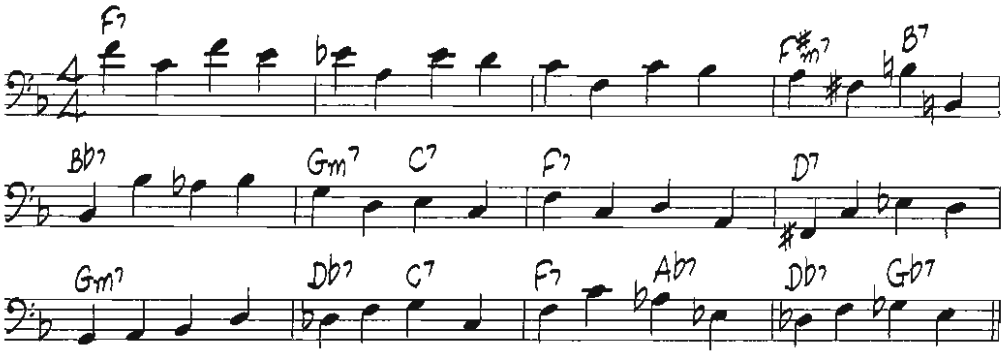
Example #74 Blues with substitute chords



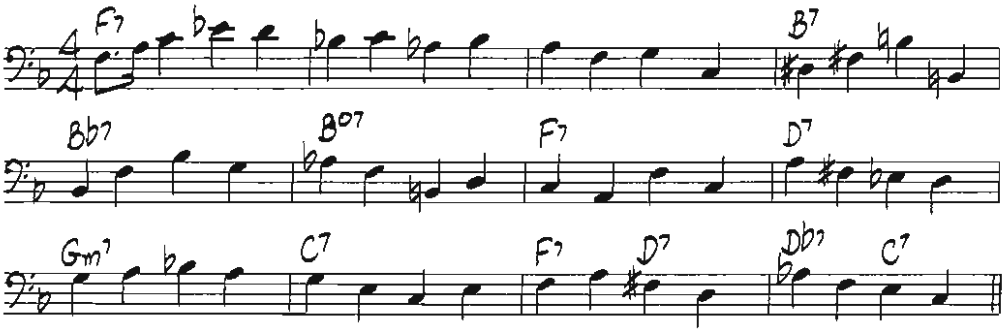
Example #75 Blues with substitute chords



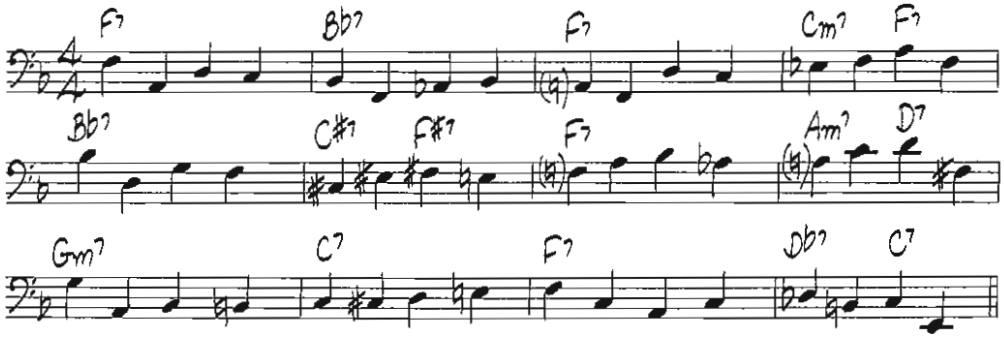
Example #76 Blues with substitute chords



Example #77 Blues with substitute chords



Example #78 Blues with substitute chords



Summary

In closing I would like to congratulate you upon completion of this volume. I should, however, also caution you. The material presented here is but the first step in learning to play walking bass lines. It is vitally important to thoroughly master these sounds, if you wish to reach higher levels of creative playing. Remember this is your ***musical foundation.*** Build it solidly.

Discography

These are a few recordings illustrating classic bass lines:

Ray Brown with the Oscar Peterson Trio
Something Warm Verve V6 8681
We Get Requests Verve V6 8606

Sam Jones with the Oscar Peterson Trio
Tristeza On Piano BASF 20734

Andy Simpkins with The Three Sounds
Feeling Good Blue Note BLP 4072
Bottoms Up Blue Note BLP 4014

Paul Chambers with Red Garland
It's A Blue World Prestige 7838
Can't See For Lookin' Prestige 7276

Scott LaFaro with Bill Evans
The Village Vanguard Sessions Milestone 47002

Charles Mingus
Changes One Atlantic 1677
Changes Two Atlantic 1678

Ron Carter with Miles Davis

Neils-Henning Ørsted Pedersen with Dexter Gordon
Stable Mable Inner City 2040

Reggie Johnson with Bobby Hutcherson
Total Eclipse Blue Note BST 84291

Bob Cranshaw with Stanley Turrentine
Easy Walker Blue Note BST 84268

Eddie Gomez with Bill Evans
Bill Evans At The Montreux Jazz Festival Verve V-8762

Jymie Merritt with Art Blakey
The Big Beat Blue Note BLP 4029
Moanin' Blue Note BLP 4003